REPEATING ACCELERATED BACCALAUREATE NURSING COURSES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF STORIES OF PERSISTENCE

by

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Abstract

Accelerated baccalaureate nursing programs (ABSN) have grown to meet the needs of the health care industry. These short-term programs attract unique groups of learners that have achieved baccalaureate degrees in other disciplines and are recruited to an intense, fast-paced program that differs from a traditional baccalaureate nursing program. The significance of the topic of retaining, assisting, and success of second-degree learners in an accelerated baccalaureate nursing program is critical to the nursing education specialty. Related factors influencing perseverance need to be better understood to improve academic success among ABSN students. The study addressed a gap in the literature pertaining to what strategies repeat students describe they used to overcome obstacles and complete ABSN courses. A basic qualitative methodology was chosen to address the gap in the literature. Participants included 11 ABSN students who had repeated a required nursing course and achieved success. Participants were male and female, with an average age of 35, from across the United States. Interviews were conducted to collect data, which was analyzed to recognize common codes and grouped into the following themes: (a) program expectations, (b) obstacles, (c) success strategies, and (f) participant guidance. Findings showed that ABSN students encountered academic and nonacademic obstacles during their educational journey. Participants shared stories of persistence that included techniques utilized to overcome obstacles and achieve success. These tools may serve as resources for other nursing students to achieve success and overcome barriers within their nursing programs. Participant stories may also help to inspire perseverance that can strengthen a student’s ability to face similar challenges in their future, personally, academically, and professionally, as registered nurses and nurse leaders. Faculty and academic stakeholders are uniquely positioned to promote change within nursing programs. Changes may come in the form of curriculum adjustments,
counseling services, and additional academic resources. Recommendations for further study suggested the inclusion of traditional baccalaureate nursing students with curriculum delivery method comparison between ABSN and BSN programs.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family, friends, and peers who have supported me throughout this doctoral journey.

To my children Vicki and Christopher...my hope is that this serves as a continued reminder and example of realizing that no goal is unattainable with passion, faith, and determination. I hope that I have made you proud. I love you both so much.

To my parents, Ted and Rose Stefanik...how I wish you could be here to share this with me, but I know every time I looked up from my desk and saw that cardinal, it was one of you watching over me.

To my husband Frank...it is not just about the doctorate, it is about everything from the day we met. You saw possibilities in me that I would never have imagined. Throughout the months and years of this endeavor, you had strength when I didn’t...you had faith when I doubted...you helped me smile and laugh when I needed it the most. You never wavered in your belief that I could accomplish anything I set my mind to and proved what can be achieved with teamwork and selfless support. Thank you for all you have sacrificed for my dreams to be realized. I am so blessed to be able to travel down life's roads with you.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Accelerated baccalaureate nursing programs (ABSN) have grown exponentially to meet the health care industry’s needs. ABSN programs are designed for individuals that achieved baccalaureate degrees in other disciplines and seek to gain a second degree (McKenna & Brooks, 2018). There are various reasons why students choose to follow the path of an ABSN program. In the United States and worldwide, academic failure in nursing school is the most common cause of attrition (Lewis, 2018). This basic qualitative study and overall purpose included exploring factors that enable accelerated baccalaureate nursing students to persevere through their nursing program after failing a course. Within the first chapter, the topic and background of the study will be introduced. Also included in the first chapter will be the rationale, purpose for the research, and significance of the study. In addition, the research design, theoretical framework, and research question are examined. Terms will be defined, and assumptions and limitations will be identified.

Background of the Study

There are various reasons why students choose to follow the path of an ABSN program. ABSN programs are short-term programs that attract an untapped group of learners recruited to an intense, fast-paced program that differs from a traditional bachelor in science of nursing (BSN) program (Beogo et al., 2015). A traditional BSN program takes approximately four years compared to an ABSN program, which takes about 16 months. Individuals accepted into ABSN programs are adults who have completed a bachelor’s or graduate degree in a non-nursing field
and who desire to transition into the field of nursing, which requires 12 to 18 months of full-time, year-round course work to achieve completion (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2020). An ABSN program requires effective time management skills, higher-order thinking, and cognitive load management (Coggins et al., 2016). The curriculum within an ABSN program is fast-paced for earlier completion, with an intense, stressful program. These second-degree programs usually include older than conventional college students with life and work experience.

Academic and nonacademic factors of success and failure are often identified in studies related to academic progression. Students’ stories of the perception of individual experiences and descriptions of techniques and resources used to accomplish success are frequently not captured. Understanding transitional experiences are essential, given the increasing number of students in second-degree accelerated nursing programs (Read & Laschinger, 2017). The significance of retaining, assisting, and continuing second-degree learners’ success in an accelerated baccalaureate nursing program is critical to the nursing education specialty. After entry into an ABSN program, nursing student retention is vital to developing nurses ready to enter the workforce (Murray et al., 2016). Although second-degree ABSN programs assist in meeting the need for the growing demand for bedside baccalaureate-prepared registered nurses, the research is limited and focused on academic factors that influence student success within the program (Schwartz & Gambescia, 2017). When students experience failure in a required nursing course, a decision to persevere and find ways to overcome obstacles or to leave nursing school is a turning point in the academic journey. The decision made will impact future personal and professional choices and accomplishments.
Bernard Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory provided a framework and rationale for studying motivational persistence when repeating ABSN courses. The attribution theory’s basis revolves around notions of causality and understanding the relationship of events. Human nature implies that individuals seek to answer the question, “why?” Questions are often contemplated about why an event occurred, how an individual attained success, or why one experienced failure in different life aspects, challenges, or goal attainment. Weiner’s theory of attribution (1986) included further exploration regarding the academic and nonacademic factors that lead to success, failure, or persistence in continuing the educational journey.

**Need for the Study**

Motivation, self-efficacy, and perseverance impact drive, success, and completion of ABSN programs (Jones-Schenk, 2018). Often, the student’s stories of perception of individual experiences are frequently not captured. There is a need to understand further other factors’ influence on student success, attrition, and future career perseverance and recognize that additional research is warranted (Owens, 2019). Some identified factors included challenges in balancing work and home life with nursing school and a lack of proper time management skills. The struggle for retention is an even more significant concern in accelerated and long-distance education. Few studies and limited research have been conducted focusing on the success rate related to students’ experiences (Fraser et al., 2018).

Research has been conducted on understanding motivational factors, stamina, and passion as predictors for success (Duckworth, 2016). A gap existed in the literature regarding how motivational factors are acquired and implemented to foster ABSN nursing student success. Although there have been decades of research conducted on academic failure and disappointment, there are weaknesses and gaps related to perseverance (Berk, 2018). Despite the
research on college student success in traditional programs, few studies specifically relate to ABSN nursing students and perseverance effort.

Students who successfully complete nursing programs then pursue the desired licensure by taking the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX). The research on the success of nursing students in a second-degree accelerated baccalaureate program indicates that first-time NCLEX pass rates have shown a significant reduction since 2013 (Oliver et al., 2018). Graduates of ABSN programs that passed NCLEX on the first try are likely to pursue further nursing education (Williams et al., 2018). Tornwall et al. (2018) stated that students within the accelerated nursing programs showed a greater need to feel competent as compared to those in alternate nursing programs. However, what is unknown is what strategies were utilized by students who repeated courses to succeed and persevere within the accelerated baccalaureate nursing program.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore what strategies repeat students described they used to overcome obstacles and complete ABSN courses. Students may also benefit by understanding what factors may hinder their success in an ABSN program to recognize future attributions management (Weiner, 1985). Faculty and administrators can utilize the information obtained from this study to establish retention services, counseling, and programs to serve this population (Murray et al., 2016). Information will be helpful for faculty members, administrators, and other practitioners interested in student retention and success within an ABSN program.
Significance of the Study

The significance of retaining, assisting, and the success of second-degree learners in an accelerated baccalaureate nursing program is critical to the nursing education specialty. Understanding student experiences of perseverance after course failure in ABSN programs will provide information that will benefit program attrition rates. To reach that goal, educators need a better understanding of factors that impede students’ success and what factors aid in academic achievement persistence. Identification of barriers to student success is critical to the nursing education specialty. According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), there will be a countrywide spread of nursing shortages between 2016 and 2030, citing the retirement of Baby Boomer nurses and increasing health care needs due to the aging of the Baby Boomer population (2020). The U.S Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022) projects growth in registered nurse positions from 2019 to 2029 of seven percent, approximately 175,900 jobs, with most employers requiring a bachelor’s degree. With the risks and impact of COVID-19 since early 2020, many nurses have left the workforce earlier than planned (Buerhaus et al., 2020). Attrition results place additional financial burdens on students, lost revenue for the university, and compound the existing nursing shortage problem (Kubec, 2017).

Williams et al. (2018) stated that the learning institution’s climate and its psychological, social, and cultural variables significantly impact student satisfaction and success. Identifying the academic gap may allow instructors to modify the curriculum (Wiersma et al., 2020). Understanding the noncognitive factors of student academic success may provide a framework to assist faculty and students in approaches to successful learning (Williams, 2018). One implication of this study was to provide information to faculty members, administrators, other practitioners, and students interested in student retention and success within the ABSN program.
Further, the information obtained was anticipated to create an understanding within nursing education to establish retention services, counseling, and plans to provide better services to this unique population (Murray et al., 2016).

The significance of this study and findings may span worldwide and over a considerable time frame. Understanding the untapped stories of students’ perseverance could open opportunities for growth and improvement at every level of academia. These individuals provided knowledge, comfort, care, empathy, and direction for the future of registered nurses. The stories of perseverance from these students will allow ABSN program information stakeholders to create additional tools for success. These tools may give more understanding and direction to assist with program attrition rates, successful program completion, and student perseverance techniques. Understanding how a student persists in the face of struggles and obstacles and the characteristics required for success may provide information for academic persistence (Duckworth, 2016). Identifying aspects of successful persistence throughout the nursing programs may help educators recognize students at risk and provide additional assistance to support the ultimate goal of licensure. If students understand factors that impact personal motivation and perseverance, it may influence future successes personally, academically, and professionally as registered nurses. Therefore, goals can be limitless when understanding and passion for personal motivation persist.

**Research Question**

What strategies do repeat students describe they used to overcome obstacles and complete ABSN courses?
Definitions of Terms Used in the Study

The information below refers to definitions of key terms used throughout this research study. Providing clarity for this terminology will assist the reader in understanding and applying of terms pertinent to this study.

**Attrition**

Attrition refers to the students who are delayed within an academic program and are removed or step out of the academic program (Alhadabi & Karpinski, 2020).

**BSN**

A BSN degree takes four years to complete and is considered the *traditional* path for nursing students.

**Grit**

Duckworth (2016) defined grit as a quality that embodied “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (p. 56-57). Grit allows individuals to dig deep within themselves and find the strength to accomplish goals.

**Perseverance**

Perseverance refers to the strength and motivation to continue through an ABSN program after failing a required course (Duckworth, 2016).

**Retention**

For this study, retention refers to the continuation within the ABSN program of study. Maintaining students within a nursing study program is a costly endeavor that will ultimately impact the supply and flow of nurses within the healthcare field.
Research Design

The methodology chosen for the research study was qualitative. A qualitative research design provides an opportunity to allow full and complete experiences to be told. The basis of qualitative research methodology focuses primarily on how people interpret their experiences in the world in which they are a part and the description of those experiences (Holloway & Galvin, 2017). A qualitative researcher accepts that what people say, what they do, and what they think result from influences contributing to that individual’s life experiences and lived events (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Kozleski (2017) stated that qualitative research methods offer the ability to advance the understanding of essential questions about education. Qualitative research also provides personal insights, meanings, and interpretations of how specific situations. As individuals are studied utilizing a qualitative method, the human side of life is not obscured among statistical equations (Taylor et al., 2016). The study included an investigation regarding stories of perseverance and perceptions of the participants’ experiences. Perseverance and perception signify qualitative research because these qualities cannot be quantitatively measured (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Utilizing a qualitative research method provided insight into the nonacademic factors that influenced this perceived challenge within ABSN programs. Qualitative research allows the participants to share subjective views in the stories and retelling of experiences and what factors contributed to student success in the ABSN program. This design allowed the collection of rich narratives of the participant’s experiences and strategies utilized and thus assisted in answering the research question.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

All research studies hold some level of assumptions and limitations. Researcher assumptions reflect the personal belief of what was drawn from the study’s conclusions
Limitations reflect external circumstances that could limit the scope of the study or the intended outcome (Gaudet & Robert, 2018). Recognition of defined assumptions and limitations will assist in ensuring validity and credibility.

**Assumptions**

Qualitative research allows the participants to share subjective views in the stories and retelling of experiences and what factors contributed to student success in the ABSN program. The philosophy underlying this study was constructivism, noting that constructivism is the foundation of a basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One assumption made in qualitative research is that each individual has a unique view or interpretation of experiences and life events. Qualitative researchers explore how people perceive and describe circumstances and situations using rich descriptions (Creswell & Creswell-Baez, 2021). This research method allows participants’ voices to be heard and not quantified. The assumption relating to this research showed that study participants interpret their understanding or perception of the situation presented through lived experiences.

The theoretical framework assumptions made in relation to Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory included the notions of causality and the understanding of the relationship of events. There are levels of measurement or characteristics that represent the theory of attribution and how it can impact motivation and success. Weiner’s (1986) theory guided this study by aiding in categorizing strategies utilized by the participants.

**Limitations**

One limitation in qualitative research is the risk of bias. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recognized that eliminating biases might be unrealistic; however, identifying the biases and how they may “shape the collection and interpretation of the data” (p. 16) will be more effective.
Therefore, bias and preconceptions are recognized (Galdas, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One strategy for mitigating bias can include interpreting the data by considering alternate explanations and ways other than those supporting the researcher’s view (MacDermid, 2017). The challenge of utilizing constructivist beliefs in basic qualitative methodology is discovering multiple opinions of how ABSN students persevered after failing a required course. Understanding of the participant’s personal experiences when retaking required ABSN courses and the meaning and interpretation the individuals placed on these experiences was needed.

Another limitation or practical consideration was that qualitative research in itself involves smaller numbers within the study. As recommended by Malterud et al. (2016) the sample size was reviewed during the research process and throughout the data analysis. This design allowed one-on-one opportunities to gather rich information in a detailed format from the participants.

ABSN programs have drawn from a unique group of individuals seeking a nursing career after completing a different degree. One delimitation was nursing students from multiple academic tracks were not included in this study. Specificity to accelerated baccalaureate nursing students was chosen due to the shortage and demand for nurses in the workforce.

As with any research study utilizing any methodology, the burden and ownership of credibility and trustworthiness lie on the researchers’ shoulders. As MacDermid (2017) recommended, alternate explanations were considered during data analysis to assist with interjecting personal bias into the results and to perform all aspects of data collection, analysis, and reporting to the highest ethical standard.
Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The organization of this study is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the study by discussing multiple aspects of the research. Chapter 1 included background information relating to the research question and the purpose and significance of the study. Other items included in Chapter 1 are definitions of terms in the study, identification of assumptions, and limitations.

The remaining chapters are organized with the following information: Chapter 2 begins with a detailed description of the guiding theoretical framework followed by a literature review. Chapter 3 will include an in-depth description of all aspects of the study related to methodology, research design, participant population, and sample criteria. Chapter 4 includes data analysis of findings and a summary of results. Chapter 5 provides interpretation, implications of the study, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter contains a review of the literature regarding perseverance and success in an accelerated baccalaureate of science in nursing program (ABSN). The literature review includes methods of searching, theoretical orientation for the study, the detailed literature review itself, and its findings. The theoretical perspective will consist of how the chosen theory was utilized as a foundation for the dissertation research. The value of the research acquired will be critiqued in relation to the research topic and chosen theory.

Methods of Searching

Initially, the search began with criteria clarification for ABSN programs obtained from the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN, 2019) and the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022). A literature inquiry for accelerated baccalaureate of science in nursing programs ABSN continued utilizing the terms BSN, graduate-entry nursing (GEN), retention, attrition, accelerated nursing, motivation, repeating, academic success, and second-degree nursing. The search was conducted through Capella University library utilizing EBSCO and ProQuest databases and Google Scholar, following the same criteria. Further delineation was performed using Summon and applying specific fields and search words. After fields and search words were specified, full text, peer-reviewed, and publication dates within five years were requested. The search revealed additional terminology about students repeating
courses. The same techniques and criteria were employed for further inquiries utilizing *grit, perseverance, success, failure, resilience*, and *attribution*.

After searching and accessing relevant articles about the research topic, further resources were obtained and explored from the references cited within the pertinent articles. This method of mining references allowed access to more current articles. Additional research studies were acquired in this manner.

**Theoretical Orientation for the Study**

Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory was utilized for the research study. Human nature would imply that individuals seek to answer the question, ”why?” Questions are asked about why an event occurred, why some individuals attained success, or why some experienced failure in different life aspects, challenges, or goal attainment. Weiner (1986) sought the answers to those questions in his theory creation, stating:

> This book is about the construction of a theory of motivation and emotion that, by virtue of the centrality of causal explanation, represents a general theory applicable to a wide variety of phenomena without apparent historical boundaries or the constraints of any particular social context. (p. 3)

Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory, sometimes referred to as the three-dimensional theory of attribution, pertains mainly to achievement and how individuals perceive the cause of result with whether or not success was obtained. The theory reflects how thinking relates to feeling and action (Weiner, 2008). Weiner’s theory guided this research study by contributing to the categorization of strategies of the participants and determining whether the locus of control was internal or external, whether the stability factor changed during the period questioned, and what degree of controllability the participant perceived (Weiner, 1972). Once a cause or explanation
for a given situation has been determined, a guide for future management or success can be utilized to produce a different final result (Weiner, 1985).

**Weiner’s Three Causal Dimensions**

The attribution theory’s basis revolves around causality notions and understanding of the relationship of events (Weiner, 1986). Further understanding of what compels motivation through event correlations supports the research and theoretical framework. Weiner (1986) defined three levels of measurement or characteristics that represent the attributional theory model and how it can impact future motivation and success: (a) locus of causality, (b) stability, and (c) controllability.

**Locus of Causality**

Individuals often seek to determine what factors contribute to success or failure. With regard to academic achievement, in particular, influences can be categorized as academic or nonacademic. According to Weiner’s (1986) theory, the locus of causality links to internal and external cues or factors. In this scenario, cause refers to the relationship between a given action and its outcome. The causality is broken down further into internal and external factors. An internal element of success or failure may be the personal ability or individual effort, whereas an external factor would relate to outlying circumstances. Locus of causality is typically the most notable means of cause when exploring whether the given situation results are self-imposed versus environmental sources (Weiner, 2018). Internal factors evoke a self-evaluation to establish individual responsibility, leading to diminished motivation in future attempts. External factors may mean that the individual may not have a decline in motivation because blame or responsibility would be due to something other than themselves.
**Stability**

An additional factor of causation is stability, which is defined as whether a given perception of a situation changes (Weiner, 1986). The cause may be fixed or vary depending on the situation or timeframe. If success is attributed to personal ability, it is considered stable. If an individual attributed success in the same situation to effort, it would be regarded as unstable. The distinction relates to character traits (stable) versus behavioral traits (unstable) (Weiner, 2018). Stability called attention to the duration of causes, whether perceived as lasting or viewed as temporary (Fishman & Husman, 2017). Various internal and external factors contribute to stability perception. For example, a stable internal factor can be personal ability, and a stable external factor can be task difficulty.

**Control**

The third characteristic of Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory relates to control. Control can be altered by the free will or choice of the individual. The individual’s thought process is that when applying more effort, the outcome will change. If students cannot change personal causal reasoning, it may create flawed attributions that impact future incentives and motivation (Fishman & Husman, 2017). An appropriate example would be academic examinations. The effort that a student applies to examination preparation is controlled. If the same student believes that the examination success was achieved by luck, the source would be uncontrolled. Weiner (1986) also acknowledged that attributions affect emotions. An individual will acquire a sense of pride if the perception is that success was due to personal intelligence rather than an external factor, such as the task’s simplicity or difficulty level.
Application of Theory to Research

The significance of retaining, assisting, and successfully managing second-degree learners in an ABSN program is imperative to nursing education. To obtain that goal, educators need to understand factors that disrupt a student’s success and what factors aid in academic achievement persistence. The nursing shortage is a worldwide concern currently fostered by student attrition rates. Planning and applying retention techniques related to undergraduate nursing student challenges help address the dominant concern associated with the lack of qualified nurses and assist in developing nurses ready to enter the workforce (Messineo et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2016). Weiner’s theory of attribution was used in this dissertation study to explore what contributes to the academic and nonacademic factors that can lead to success, failure, or persistence in continuing the educational journey. Knowledge of how a student sustains in the face of struggles and obstacles and the characteristics required for success will provide essential data relating to academic persistence (Duckworth, 2016). Weiner’s theory guided this research study by categorizing the participants’ strategies in acknowledging whether the locus of control is internal or external, whether the stability factor changed during the period in question, and what degree of controllability the participant perceived (Weiner, 1972). Theory in qualitative research becomes an interpretive lens of understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Understanding various attributes creates a degree of control and predictability in defined situations. Although a student may believe that intelligence is a stable attribute, achievement expectations may be lower in future tasks if a failure occurs. Bajwa et al. (2016) found that the sense of self and personal characteristics, behavioral characteristics, environmental elements, and stressors impact an individual’s locus of control. Further exploration of internal and external factors helps distinguish future influences and controllability of success or failure. An additional
study by Martin and Kennett (2019) suggested that retraining a student to think of attributions for unfavorable results from uncontrollable to controllable may elevate self-control perception. Controllability and recognition of the locus of control may impact whether the student is more or less motivated to continue and actively pursue original academic goals. In a study conducted by Clem et al. (2018), students more often attributed the lack of success to the task’s difficulty level or external attributes and success to personal ability. Individual understanding of attributes that contribute to behaviors may allow modifications to be implemented to understand and control future conditions.

Understanding the attribution of success is vital, given the number of students entering ABSN programs and the extensive need for qualified nurses in the health care industry worldwide. Recognition of academic and nonacademic factors of success and failure could result in the knowledge and creation of tools to overcome future obstacles instead of abandoning educational pursuits. These tools can be implemented in all aspects of life, including professional behavior and accomplishments. Once a cause or explanation of a given problem is recognized, a guide for future management or success can be utilized to produce a different result (Weiner, 1985). This research and the relevance of applying Weiner’s theory could provide information to faculty members, administrators, and other practitioners interested in student retention and success within ABSN and other academic programs.

**Review of the Literature**

Nursing education is offered on multiple platforms and different nursing tracks. Universities exert great effort in student retention but are still experiencing failure and withdrawal from nursing classes and nursing programs (Dvorak, 2019). The significance of understanding retention, assistance, and success factors of second-degree learners in an
accelerated baccalaureate nursing program is imperative to the growth and prosperity of the nursing education specialty. In assessing the importance of this research, existing literature in nursing education related to persistence in ABSN programs was reviewed within each subtopic. The review comprised the subtopics or themes, including nursing need/shortage, ABSN program criteria, factors and predictors of academic success and academic challenges, well-being and the impact on academic success/failure, and understanding persistence, resilience, and retention.

**Nursing Needs and Shortages**

ABSN or GEN programs have grown exponentially to meet the needs of the health care industry and student demands. According to the AACN (2020), there will be a countrywide spread of nursing shortages between 2016 and 2030, citing the retirement of Baby Boomer nurses and increasing health care needs due to the aging of the Baby Boomer population. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022) predicted an average of 194,500 registered nurse job openings each year over the next 10 years. Nursing shortages have been evident worldwide, mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although AACN (2020) reported a growth of 5.1% in nursing program enrollment, the increase will not be enough to meet the shortage of nurses and nursing faculty. In 2021, Buerhaus addressed concerns regarding nursing shortages and long-term consequences. Buerhaus termed deficiencies between 50,000 and 150,000 unfilled registered nurse (RN) positions as a Category 5 shortage. Buerhaus (2021) categorized the loss in terms of nursing experience stating, “The nursing workforce will lose more than 2 million years of nursing experience each year between 2020-2030” (p. 248). Although nursing graduates are entering the workforce, it will not be easy to replace retiring nurses with new graduates, especially in high acuity areas. The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated the Baby Boomer retirement shortage that was expected.
The shortage may be exacerbated by nursing students turning away from the profession after graduation due to the pandemic. Lin et al. (2021) emphasized how the impact of COVID-19 on the nursing workforce worldwide has created an even more pronounced recognition of staffing shortages. Due to the deficit, new graduate nurses are entering the health care industry and are immediately filling positions in intensive care units (McLernon, 2020). These new nurses are facing rapid changes, including new medications, modified protocols, and fewer resources (Huffman et al., 2021). As the demand and need for nurses increases worldwide, nursing students become a critical factor in the nursing workforce. Lin et al. (2021) gathered opinions from nursing students in China relating to their intent of career pursuit after completion of nursing school and whether COVID-19 impacted their decision. The study results indicated that a considerable number of those who participated might step away from the nursing profession after graduation. Universities are also at risk of students leaving nursing programs before completion.

Medical personnel are at the forefront of any pandemic and put their own lives at risk when caring for patients and performing their required duties. Huang et al. (2020) also conducted a comparative study in China investigating responses and coping strategies in nurses and nursing students during the COVID-19 outbreak. Participants were nursing students and nurses aged 18-26 years old. The study revealed that influences on patient care included anxiety, fear, sadness, and anger during the COVID-19 outbreak. Nurses were found to have a better ability to adopt coping strategies to deal with the tensions and uncertainties that came with the epidemic. Nursing students did not have the same problem-focused coping skills, which creates an uncertain outcome regarding nursing students completing their education and entering the nursing profession. Spurlock (2020) expanded on the impact of COVID-19 and the nursing shortage in the United States, recognizing that the pandemic caused a significant interruption in
the clinical component of nursing education. Worldwide, universities and colleges faced restrictions in face-to-face traditional learning venues. Nursing students also faced cancellations from health care facilities unable to provide additional personal protective equipment for students and the staff. Although nursing educators continually embrace new, distance, and remote technologies, this caused an interruption in nursing education, with some students choosing not to complete their nursing education journey. Spurlock (2020) further encouraged federal and local elected officials to recognize nurses’ commitment and provide support on all levels to nurses, nursing faculty, and nursing students to serve the population’s needs effectively.

Another aspect of the nursing shortage that Buerhaus (2021) recognized are nursing graduates leaving their positions after a little more than a year to pursue nurse practitioner (NP) positions. Although some of these registered nurses (RN) may have continued working while in school, many decreased their hours to part-time status, while others left their jobs to concentrate on their graduate nursing education. The growing interest in acquiring an NP license and experienced nurses retiring created shortages before the pandemic.

Jarosinski et al. (2022) conducted a study before COVID-19 that explored how nursing program administrators viewed the upcoming nurse faculty shortage. Due to the variance between clinical practice and academic salaries, administrators are often challenged in filling faculty positions. Most faculty vacancy positions prefer or require doctoral-prepared faculty, which has limited the choices. Universities may restrict the number of accepted applicants to the nursing program due to increased faculty challenges, creating a domino effect of limiting new registered nurses entering an already needful environment.

Haddad et al. (2022) found that although the nursing profession faces shortages, the projected number also impacts nursing faculty. Nurse shortages create a domino effect in that
nursing faculty shortages may mandate enrollment limitations, limiting the number of graduating nurses. Haddad et al. (2022) cited turnover rates of 8.8% to 37.0%, depending on demographics and specialty. Some reasons nurses may choose to leave their profession range from nurse burnout, family obligations, and violence in the workplace setting. These reasons compound the concern about staffing ratios and safety in the healthcare industry.

Jarosinski et al. (2022) also found that administrators acknowledged the stress of changing faculty expectations. Because full-time positions requiring advanced degrees are becoming more challenging to fill, the current full-time faculty members are experiencing an increased workload with the expectation of guiding adjunct faculty members. Those with advanced doctoral degrees often sacrifice further scholarship and research due to additional obligations with new part-time/adjunct faculty (Jarosinski et al., 2022). Current trends show that many faculty are returning to practice knowing the workload will be complete at the end of a shift. Administrators acknowledge that faculty work nonstop to keep up with demands due to shortages.

Ulrich (2021) emphasized that the nursing shortage will not end when the pandemic passes. Although the nursing shortage was expected within the Baby Boomer nursing community, it has escalated dramatically since 2020. Baby Boomer nurses may have advanced their retirement date because of the side effects of the pandemic. These nurses may have gotten sick themselves, had family members they were trying to protect by not bringing the illness home, and may not have been able or willing to keep up with the new psychological and physical demands within their practice. Job opportunities continue to expand for experienced nurses beyond the hospital environment, leaving recruitment and retention high on the hospital agenda.
Accelerated Baccalaureate of Science in Nursing (ABSN) Program Criteria

ABSN programs were first introduced in the United States in the 1970s and have grown exponentially to meet the needs of the health care industry and student demands. ABSN programs are designed for individuals that achieved baccalaureate degrees in other disciplines and seek to gain a second degree (McKenna & Brooks, 2018). Individuals accepted into ABSN programs are adults who have completed a bachelor’s or graduate degree in a non-nursing field and desire to transition into nursing. Many of these second-degree students are familiar and comfortable with a traditional formal baccalaureate program. They may encounter some resistance to taking additional responsibility for their own learning experience (Posey & Pintz, 2017). These individuals present with unique learning styles and characteristics. Tornwall et al. (2018) showed that accelerated nursing students bring life experiences and strong, professional expertise from past work history.

These short-term programs attract an untapped group of learners recruited to an intense, fast-paced program that differs from a traditional baccalaureate nursing (BSN) program (Beogo et al., 2015). ABSN programs require 12 to 18 months of full-time, year-round course work to complete, approximately half the time needed for a traditional baccalaureate nursing program (AACN, 2020). The curriculum within an ABSN program is fast-paced for earlier completion, with an intense, stressful curriculum. Courses completed in 15 weeks in a traditional BSN program may take as little as 7 weeks in an ABSN program. AACN (2020) reported 282 ABSN programs, with more than 30 additional programs in the planning stages. These second-degree programs usually include older than conventional college students with life and work experience.

A study by Wiersma et al. (2020) credited ABSN programs for more than double the number of nurses entering the workforce from 2001 to 2012. The average age of the participants
was 37 years old. The challenges faced by these new nurses included practice readiness concerns and feelings of unpreparedness to enter the field. Wiersma et al. (2020) further explored the concept that even after choosing nursing as a second degree, some ABSN graduate students may not continue working within the nursing profession, citing 17.5% leaving in the first year and 33% after only two years. Further identification of challenges new ABSN nurses experience creates opportunities for curriculum modifications.

Retention of students following entry into an ABSN program is vital to producing nurses ready to enter the health care industry. Students who complete nursing programs pursue the desired licensure by taking the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX). Williams et al. (2018) found that graduates of ABSN programs that passed NCLEX on the first attempt were likely to pursue further nursing education. Although second-degree ABSN programs assist in meeting the growing demand for bedside/clinical baccalaureate-prepared registered nurses, further research is needed to understand the factors that influence student success within the program (Schwartz & Gambescia, 2017).

Factors Influencing Academic Performance

Academic and nonacademic factors of success and failure are often identified in studies related to academic progression. Nursing student academic success has fostered growing worldwide interest due to its economic impact and the availability of nurses in the healthcare industry. Williams et al. (2018) stated that the climate of the learning institution and its variables of psychological, social, and cultural significantly impact student satisfaction and success. Tinto (2016) stated that educational factors, social factors, student backgrounds, demographics, and lived experiences all factored into student success. Students’ stories of the perception of individual experiences and descriptions of techniques and resources used to accomplish success
are frequently not captured. Understanding transitional experiences are essential, given the increasing number of students in second-degree accelerated baccalaureate nursing programs (Read & Laschinger, 2017).

Academic failure in nursing programs is seen worldwide. Dube and Mlotshwa (2018) conducted a survey in South Africa that reinforced previous concerns that the nursing shortage and nursing school attrition can have devastating results on the nursing profession worldwide. Dube and Mlotshwa (2018) explored factors relating to the socioeconomic history and students’ efficacy level as contributing factors in adjustment to a nursing school learning environment. The researchers determined the nursing student’s perceptions of the factors that influenced their academic performance. Some factors identified were communication skills, proper faculty direction, guidance, and family stressors. Although the study’s results identified negative and positive influences that impacted individual academic performance, a gap was referenced, acknowledging that it did not capture the student’s role in educational improvement. Similarly, Chavan et al. (2019) conducted a descriptive exploratory study that focused on factors that affected the continued challenge of failure of nursing students. In addition, Izadi et al. (2016) identified and acknowledged multiple factors contributing to nursing students’ failures. These factors included family pressures, teachers’ demands, and working in an ABSN program. Although Chavan et al. (2019) and Izadi et al. (2016) identified contributing factors to failure, and the need to help students overcome obstacles, there was no reference to how students were to achieve this success or if they had eventually achieved success.

Barton et al. (2017) provided research focusing on identifying the noncognitive characteristics of nursing students who could not complete an ABSN program. A holistic preadmission assessment was provided to identify the characteristics of students that graduated
and students that did not successfully complete the ABSN program. The researchers could not determine if these predictors could assist in student selection before admission. Success attributes and strategies were not identified if there was a failure of courses during the ABSN program. Barton et al. (2017) did not further identify if students with specific characteristics were successful with no failure during the program. However, Cadet (2021) reviewed multiple studies conducted between 1981 and 2019, which showed that the majority of ABSN programs have a significant degree of online learning. Cadet’s (2021) investigations revealed that many characteristics could impact success, including culture, gender, motivation, self-efficacy, and self-persistence. The researcher also suggested that faculty must be sensitive in developing different teaching strategies based on learning characteristics. For students to achieve their goals, they need to be aware of factors that may impact their readiness to learn. In addition, Smith-Wacholz et al. (2019) reviewed nursing students and retention. Factors that influence success in the nursing program include but were not limited to stress reduction, personal goal achievement, lack of mentorship, and lack of clinical coaches and advisors to guide students through the program from the beginning. Students felt unprepared and overwhelmed by the large amount of information learned in a short time. Smith-Wacholz et al. (2019) acknowledged Knowles (1978) regarding adult learners and their ability to bring life experiences to their educational journey. Curriculum modifications included clearly defined objectives and problem-solving scenarios for critical thinking. Barton et al. (2017) also noted that a student’s background might impede their success within a nursing program, concluding that some individuals may not be a suitable match for a nursing career.

Nursing schools must report student outcome data to maintain ongoing accreditation (Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education [CCNE], 2022). However, the data does not
explicitly reflect the number of repeaters and if they completed the program. A scoping review conducted by Lewis (2020) showed that although attention is placed on students who drop out of nursing school, repeaters tend to be a hidden subgroup. These students have the potential for success but may require additional resources and support systems. Lewis (2018) found that the issue of nursing students repeating classes was evident in all prelicensure nursing programs. Similar perceptions that repeat students experienced included academic, social, emotional, and financial consequences, and they found themselves unprepared for the academic rigor of the nursing curriculum. Handwerker (2018) found that failure of one or more courses was often associated with a decreased likelihood of program completion. Often when students do not pass a required course at the beginning portion of the nursing program, the additional cost to repeat a class, access tutors and further academic resources, and lost wages due to the delay, they forego completion of the program.

DiMattio and Hudacek (2020) conducted a secondary analysis exploring the different needs of educating Generation Z (Gen Z) students born between 1996 and 2015. These students expected dynamic learning environments on campus and in the clinical setting. Gen X individuals preferred using technology and variety in academia instead of a lecture and also worked well in a self-paced environment and application-based learning. Many students in this generational window selected individual career opportunities over long-term commitments to large organizations, placing their happiness first. In addition, anxiety is a powerful issue for individuals within this category. The study conducted by DiMattio and Hudacek (2020) documented factors of student success within the Gen X cohort and recognized that failure to meet the specific needs of these students can impact their success rate. Modifying teaching techniques and following up with a skill application in the clinical setting enhanced satisfaction.
Similarly, in a mixed-methods survey of student perceptions of faculty presence in accelerated online courses, Zajac and Lane (2020) reported that students felt faculty could increase their online presence with timely feedback, authentic communication, flexibility, and genuine investment in student success. The National League of Nursing’s (NLN) Core Competencies for Academic Nurse Educators (2022) and the World Health Organizations (WHO) Nurse Educator Core Competencies (2016) identified strategies at three different levels for implementation for improvement. Nurse educators are expected to “demonstrate caring, confidence, patience, integrity, and flexibility to facilitate learning” (WHO, 2016. p. 14). These competencies included immediate individual action, new faculty onboarding initiation, and fundamental change across the curriculum.

Academic failure can be linked to cognitive aptitude. Twidwell et al. (2019) suggested the utilization of the Nursing Cognitive Aptitude Model (NCAM) as a guide during the admissions process. The NCAM determines the student’s ability to demonstrate the capacity to learn and apply that knowledge successfully in a nursing program. If students cannot complete the program, they are left with tremendous debt without a career in the foreseeable future to repay that debt. The emotional cost of disappointment, anxiety and stress is also considered. Students’ acceptance into an ABSN program is based on grade point average (GPA), standardized testing, and completion of academic requirements. Although students may be required to take a standardized test to be accepted into the program, it does not include critical thinking components. Nursing education is clearly more than the acquisition of knowledge. It requires applying knowledge in critical thinking and clinical decision-making situations. Although critical thinking can improve with time and experience, baseline ability is needed. If
entrance testing is utilized, it will assist in selecting the most capable students, eventually creating nurses to provide safe, quality care.

Burger and Naude (2019) utilized a quantitative higher education study and compared the differences between first-generation and continuous-generation students worldwide. First-generation students often have a lower level of academic success than those who are continuous-generation students. Students with continuous-generation families have better academic skills and have been exposed to different educational experiences. First generation students often come from a lower socio-economic background and usually are not as involved in academic activities. However, lower socioeconomic groups may not place the same level of importance on higher education and may be unable to provide the financial support needed. First generation students also receive less family support and often need to work full time. These factors can lead to lower levels or failed attempts at academic success. Burger and Naude (2019) emphasized the importance of peer interactions for motivational purposes and success. The researchers confirmed that first generation students are less academically successful than those from a continuous educational background.

In the Netherlands, Bakker et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study that explored why the late dropout rate was approximately 6% higher than previous dropout rates. Some demographic factors discovered included younger male students that felt unprepared for the academic challenges of the university. Bakker et al. (2019) did not differentiate between early and late dropout rates. Two prominent themes were that students felt overwhelmed and a divide between personal expectations and the reality of the academic rigor of nursing school and challenging clinical placements. Bakker et al. (2019) recognized the impact of character traits that may have hindered the learning process, including insecurity, lack of ability and confidence
to talk about problems in the clinical rotations, and feeling a lack of preparedness for nursing. These students often required more support and direction. Often these feelings triggered additional anxiety and depression, snowballing into lack of sleep and neglect of self-care. Students shared that they stayed in the program until they felt nursing was not a fit for them as a career, triggering the late dropout time frame.

Meyer et al. (2021) conducted a study exploring the impact of student debt on ABSN or GEN professional satisfaction. Tuition for ABSN/GEN programs can range from approximately $16,000 to $100,000 (Millett, 2016). Debt may be compounded since many of these students have already accrued debt while obtaining their first degree. The Institute for College Access & Success (2018) estimated that the average undergraduate debt in 2018 in the United States ranged from $19,750 to $38,650. Some students utilized credit cards at a higher interest rate to finance their ABSN education. The impact of increasing student debt may delay life factors such as purchasing a home, getting married and starting a family. Often, students are not even aware of their total debt and have not devised a plan to pay off student debt. Millett (2016) surveyed students which showed that they remained in the program because quitting at midpoint would mean large student debt and nothing to show in return. The researchers also recommended that since ABSN/GEN students aid in the nursing shortage problem, personal student debt needs to be addressed.

In the same respect, Iheduru-Anderson (2021) conducted a qualitative study based on RN-BSN programs. Although RN-BSN programs differ slightly from ABSN, RN-BSN programs contain many of the same components and hurdles as the ABSN track. There are similarities between ABSN and RN-BSN programs in that they can range from a 7-week semester to a 15-week one. The demand for bachelor-prepared nurses fostered the creation of this type of program
for those that had achieved an associate degree (AD) and were then required to progress to a bachelor’s degree in nursing. Additional studies have shown a connection between bachelor-prepared nurses and improved patient outcomes (AACN, 2020). Many states adopted laws to foster the growth of bachelor-prepared nurses requiring AD nurses to complete a bachelor’s program within 10 years of being initially licensed. Completion time frames are imperative to maintain proper accreditation for the nursing program. Iheduru-Anderson (2021) discovered multiple factors impacted the completion of the RN-BSN programs. Academic aspects revealed themes related to faculty feedback, support, and communication. Nonacademic factors included financial restraints, family and work scheduling conflicts, poor time management, technology struggles, and challenges with writing skills. Some participants required to participate in the RN-BSN program also had delayed progress because the extrinsic factor was the job requirement for completion instead of individual achievement.

**Well-Being and Academic Success**

Worldwide studies have shown a correlation between the well-being of healthcare workers and undergraduate nursing students’ self-confidence in handling stressful situations and challenges (Lin et al., 2021). COVID-19 preliminary data suggested that frontline nursing staff have substantially higher levels of depression, anxiety, and fear, increasing their risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Huffman et al., 2021). Musso et al. (2019) conducted a study of Emergency Medical Service Personnel (EMTs), confirming the relationship between grit and resilience. The combination of grit and resilience suggests an association with retention in settings such as the military, graduation rates, and remaining married. Alhadabi and Karpinski (2020) supported that grit significantly predicts students’ academic outcomes and overall well-being. Gurkova and Zelenikova (2018) documented that lengthy periods of stress negatively
impact academic performance, student success, and individual student well-being. Emotional and physiological states specify the importance of health and well-being and their impact on self-efficacy improvement.

Capability is more often about one’s perception of capability than the individual’s actual capability. The awareness of the body’s physical and emotional response to specific situations may impact how one’s ability is viewed or perceived (Bandura, 1997). Individuals consider their self-efficacy and ability to achieve goals based on their perception of the impact of physiological and emotional stressors, including fatigue, anxiety, fitness level, stress, and coping mechanisms. Extreme worry about success created lower self-efficacy (Webb-Williams, 2018). Williams (2020) encouraged nursing faculty to understand the different mindsets to foster academic success. Teachers with a fixed mindset often believe in intelligence and ability while missing the learning opportunities that failure may present. Williams (2020) suggested the growth mindset model as an academic success tool allowing students to grow with their intelligence instead of feeling that they are not intelligent enough for nursing school. Williams (2020) challenged nursing faculty and administrators to encourage the growth mindset throughout the nursing curriculum and in student interaction.

Bartlett et al. (2016) conducted a survey comparing nursing and non-nursing students’ stress levels and recognized that nursing students reported the highest stress levels throughout their educational journey. The researcher’s hypothesis proved accurate, noting that nursing students reported a higher stress level than the average student body over one year. Bartlett et al. (2016) showed that 6.9% of non-nursing students had never experienced stress over one year, whereas no nursing student rated the same. Nursing students were shown to experience above-average stress levels consistently. Bartlett et al. (2016) found that nursing students represented a
significant number of cases and treatments for anxiety disorders over the 12 months the study was conducted compared to non-nursing students. Also, nursing students reported additional stress-related symptoms like illness, migraines, anxiety, and sleep deprivation. Although it may not be possible to eliminate the causes of stress for nursing students, faculty may be able to assist students in self-care techniques. These techniques may help develop effective coping strategies in nursing school as students become nurses and enter the healthcare environment. Bhurtun et al. (2021) sought to understand coping strategies concurrent with stress level changes in Finnish nursing students. Bhurtun et al. (2021) referred to the theoretical framework of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and recognized that problem-based and emotion-based coping strategies are two types. Problem-based coping focuses on altering the event that is causing the stress. Emotion-based aims to manage the emotions related to the actual event. Nursing students participating in this study provided background information, clinical assignment area, stress sources, stress levels, and coping strategies. Bhurtun et al. (2021) concluded that nursing students’ stress levels increased over time as they progressed through the nursing program. As students progress through the nursing program and obtain a higher level of responsibility and accountability, stress levels increase based on feelings of skill and knowledge insufficiency. The researchers encouraged nurse educators to support problem and emotion-based coping strategies from the beginning of the nursing program to foster well-being in the students.

Recognizing that second-degree nursing students’ level of stress may be amplified, Marthiensen et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative exploratory study of the effectiveness of a shortened version of a mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) intervention. MBSR is an evidence-based program that views stress and anxiety through a lens of personal awareness. The researchers used qualitative data and recognized common topics of self-compassion, hitting the
reset button, avoiding a downward spiral, and utilizing internal coping mechanisms. Participants found that consciously hitting a reset button allowed them to recognize stress levels and reevaluate their perception of the situation. Self-compassion allowed participants to accept their limitations and view the situation from a modified perspective. Identifying and avoiding a downward spiral allowed participants to pause and reflect on the current situation before a build-up of stress and anxiety ensued. Using an internal coping mechanism allowed participants to focus inwardly instead of utilizing external stress management methods. Marthiensen et al. (2019) concluded that the data supported the effectiveness of stress management techniques in the nursing curriculum in ABSN programs. This process could provide long-term effects when entering the healthcare system as registered nurses.

Nursing programs contain unique cultural qualities, and knowing individual student characteristics may improve the chances of student success. Findings by Williams et al. (2018) are consistent with the Sullivan Commission that the climate of the learning institution and its psychological, social, and cultural variables had a significant impact on the satisfaction and success of the student. To predict second-degree nursing student success, Barton et al. (2017) utilized the Hogan Personality Inventories (HPI) a reputable online assessment used to predict success in many stressful and non-stressful occupational areas. Eighty-six participants were involved in the study, which measured traits on the Five-Factor Model. In addition to cognitive abilities, Hogan Inventories suggested that selection criteria include life experiences and personal attributes. The inventory has three different assessments: Hogan Personality Inventory, Hogan Developmental Survey, and Motives, Values, Preferences Inventory. Business organizations often use this model to determine an individual’s fit within the organization. Barton et al. (2017)
supported holistic assessment information to determine what student characteristics are more predictive of success as a second-degree nursing student and further as a future registered nurse.

The progression from nursing student to full-time registered nurse is overwhelming, especially when the atmosphere in the healthcare industry is short-handed and stressful. The concept of nursing burnout indicates a negative perception of the healthcare environment and promotes the decision to leave the nursing profession. Brook et al. (2021) organized a mixed-methods study to understand nursing students’ experiences to decrease burnout and retain future nurses early in their careers. The approach was implemented to increase the number of nursing students as the conduit for supplying and replenishing the nursing deficit. Brook et al. (2021) acknowledged that implementing strategies to overcome the nursing deficit has become a priority globally. However, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) reported that 30 to 60% leave their jobs within the first year of obtaining their nursing licensure. The researchers, nursing students, and nurses co-designed an intervention that implemented 3 to 4 Activity Days in the last semester of nursing school. The activities, which included coping with stress, time management techniques, and discussion of current events, inspired a shared sense of understanding and a shared sense of identity. Students, facilitators, and nurses felt that the information was appropriate and would positively add to the nursing curriculum. Participants suggested that adding the Activity Days to the beginning of the nursing program would create continuity and insight that would aid in the transition from nursing student to registered nurse.

Kacan and Pallos (2021) addressed the global problem of nursing education stress, utilizing a sample from Turkey, which suggested that long periods of stress will negatively impact decision-making abilities and professional development. Labrage (2017) found that while students are in nursing school, they often experience stressful encounters with academic
and clinical education, economic circumstances, and psychosocial and environmental issues, all of which contribute to stress levels. Recognized causes of academic stressors included fear of failing courses, heavy workloads, grade comparison to peers, and challenging examinations. The clinical component of nursing school often brings its stress factors, including fear of making mistakes, lack of needed skills, lack of support from health care staff, and pressure from clinical instructors. Kacan and Pallos (2021) conducted a study using the Nursing Education Stress Scale (NESS) developed by Gray-Toft and Anderson (1981). The data compiled verified that stress is a universal challenge among nursing students and that nursing students experience elevated stress levels both in the classroom and clinical environment. The researchers suggested a more extensive sampling and further providing nursing students with the tools needed to cope with stress through activities, elective courses, or available counseling.

Wei et al. (2021) explored the impact of nursing student burnout on psychological well-being and academic achievement. Even though psychological issues are recognized in physicians and registered nurses working in the health care industry, medical and nursing students are also at high risk for profession-related stress (Reith, 2018). Often health care workers have a passion for caring for others, yet they do not prioritize self-care and self-needs. Much research is conducted on nursing burnout, but more recently, the burnout rate in nursing students was recognized as well. Emotional burnout reported in nursing school students showed higher anxiety levels, insecurities in their clinical abilities, depression, and overall emotional exhaustion. Research from Sanches et al. (2017) showed that 37% of nursing students considered withdrawing from nursing courses compared to students who used engagement-promoting strategies. Also, when students disengage from peers, the disengagement creates a sense of isolation and decreased level of effective communication. Personal factors may also contribute to
student burnout. Some examples are financial burdens that require employment during school. In addition, many students have preexisting low perceptions of themselves and their ability to achieve professional success. The study by Sanches et al. (2017) revealed that promoting positive self-image and peer engagement can help alleviate nursing school burnout. Faculty and clinical instructors can encourage students to learn through negative experiences. Faculty and students who build trustworthy relationships and foster growth through encouragement and positive feedback empower a supportive learning environment. Reinforcement through interventions may promote psychological health and well-being.

As the demand for nurses rises and stressors for nursing students increases, the American Nurses Association (ANA, 2015) Code of Ethics for Nurses reiterated the importance and duty of a nurse to advocate for the health, safety, and well-being of patients, but also to implement the practice of personal self-care. As a prerequisite for caring for others, there falls an obligation for the nurse to institute proper self-care. This same principle can apply to nursing students. Linton and Koonmen (2020) observed that if nurses are stressed and tired, they cannot focus and may lack the motivation to care for others or themselves. When nursing students participate in school-required clinical rotations, they see firsthand the toll it takes on nurses and the impact it may have on patient care. Nursing associations worldwide, included in The International Council of Nurses (ICN), represent over 20 million nurses. The ICN (2012) Code of Ethics states that nurses must maintain personal health and well-being to care for patients properly. Many nursing organizations provide and encourage registered nurses and health care professionals to implement self-care practices and techniques. Nevins and Sherman (2016) stressed that little or no priority is given to nursing students’ self-care practices and strategies for preparing to accomplish academic goals and enter the same health care environment. Green (2020)
recognized factors that impacted accelerated nursing student performance, including sleep deprivation, unhealthy nutrition and exercise habits, negative self-image, and overall stress relating to fear and anxiety over nursing program success. Green (2020) also conducted a 5-week study of accelerated nursing students, introducing the ANA (2015) Code of Ethics for Nurses Statement that emphasized the importance of health and safety of patients and self. The researchers introduced students to alternative therapies like aromatherapy, journaling, and positive affirmations. Faculty members also served as holistic mentors who taught students these therapies as patient care techniques. When students applied this information to patient care, they understood better how this adapts to self-care. Green (2020) further focused on accelerated nursing students due to the rigor and stress of a fast-paced, intense curriculum. However, self-care education implemented within nursing curriculum programs can benefit all nursing students. The long-term benefits will resonate with the positive nurse and patient care outcomes.

Persistence, Resilience, and Retention

The significance of the topic of retaining, assisting, and success of ABSN learners is critical to the nursing education specialty. Universities exert great effort in student retention but are still experiencing failure and class withdrawal from nursing programs (Dvorak, 2019). Tinto (1975), a known theorist of higher education and student retention, conducted studies on dropout rates in higher education, stating that the figures remained consistent throughout many years. Tinto (1993) further observed and analyzed that dropout rates were at approximately 45% consistently over a 100-year time frame. More than 35 years since that study was conducted, higher education continues the struggle with student retention. Fraser et al. (2018) further stated that the battle for retention is an even more significant concern in ABSN and long-distance education. The reasoning for attrition in ABSN students is complex and unique to each student.
The results of attrition place additional financial burdens on students’ lost revenue for the university and continue to compound the existing nursing shortage challenge (Kubec, 2017). Although modifications and growth are evident in reaching additional students and communities through distance education, retention remains an unaddressed issue from the student’s perspective. This concern has grown with distance education becoming more popular. Examining the mindset of students who have repeated courses successfully may provide faculty and students with an understanding of approaches to learning, persevering, and achieving success (Williams, 2018). The significance of retaining, assisting, and success of ABSN learners is critical to the nursing education specialty. It is imperative to foster retention, ensure students’ progress, and help them complete their nursing program successfully (Kukkonen et al., 2016). Murray et al. (2016) stated that understanding student mindsets could help establish retention services, counseling, and programs to serve students more effectively.

Stoffel and Cain (2018) recognized noncognitive traits related to attitude, motivation, and personal temperament as essential skills for medical professionals, including nursing students. Examination of motivation, self-efficacy, and perseverance are elements impacting drive, success, and completion of ABSN programs. Although decades of research have been conducted concerning academic failure and disappointment, there are weaknesses and gaps in statistical analysis methodologies and sample selection related to perseverance (Berk, 2018). Perseverance or persistence would mean that the student continues through the program, retaking required nursing classes after failure. Duckworth (2016) utilized the term “grit” to explain how individuals persist and the passion involved in persevering. Duckworth’s (2016) research concluded that passion, motivation, and stamina (grit) are reliable predictors of success.
Duckworth (2016) defined grit as an achievement-related skill that allows an individual to achieve long-term goals.

Resilience is a psychological characteristic that enables an individual to cope with stressful situations while thriving and maintaining well-being (Huffman et al., 2021). Resilient individuals view stressful situations as a challenge to overcome. Stoffel and Cain (2018) indicated that academic resilience is the increased probability of success despite traumatic events and conditions. Ali-Abadi et al. (2021) conducted a study that explored factors related to the resilience of nursing students and reported that nursing students promoted resilience utilizing multiple techniques. Some of those techniques included adjusting the learning process, determining specific academic goals, initiating improved time management skills, and evaluating existing performance levels. The researchers found that although numerous studies related to this topic, only one study was designed specifically for nursing students.

In an ABSN program, grit may help improve students’ impression of academic success. Students may also benefit from understanding what factors hindered their success in ABSN programs and recognize future attributions management (Weiner, 1985). Hodge et al. (2018) recommended that further research is required to understand what characteristics correlated to perseverance and academic success. A student’s mindset can influence how students undertake the academic pursuit challenges and implement learning strategies (Duckworth, 2016). Dillon-Bleich (2018) recognized that strength-based learning recognition and positive psychology are prevalent in adult education and corporations for individuals struggling to stay engaged and productive. Jachimowicz et al. (2018) performed a meta-analysis of 127 studies to determine if passion was included in the studies of grit and perseverance. The combination of persistence and passion propels an individual forward to success. Jachimowicz et al. (2018) supported the theory.
that a combination of perseverance and passion fulfilled the accurate predictions of the idea of grit and success.

Furthermore, McCabe (2016) encouraged the nurturing of nursing students through interaction with nurses in the clinical setting who exemplify the true definition of grit. ABSN students may utilize these strategies as they progress from nursing school into the same health care environment and clinical setting where nurses provide patient care. However, Berk (2018) took a humorous approach in the review of understanding disappointment and failure through the utilization of grit in academia from a professor’s viewpoint. Berk (2018) concluded that “grit is within everyone’s grasp,” including instructors who can implement those tools personally and to students so that students can thrive (p. 100).

Despite more focused attention on the retention and progression of nursing students, Elmir et al. (2019) conducted semistructured interviews to understand student experiences and the perception of support during their transition to a nursing program that offered both part-time and full-time status. Elmir et al. (2019) found nursing students to be determined and resilient during their time in nursing school. To reach the benchmarks of the nursing program, students relied on peers and faculty instructors to provide valuable support. Along with Elmir et al. (2019), Thomas and Revell (2016) also found the common-sense idea of encouragement came from the support of family, friends, and peers currently in the nursing program or that had been at one point in their academic journey. ten Hoeve et al. (2017) conducted a study in the Netherlands and found that attrition rates among second-degree nursing students are highest during the first and second years. Students shared feelings of inadequacy with skills application in the clinical environment and feeling unprepared to meet the professional demands of the program. Students felt that although the expectation was that they show empathy toward patients,
faculty often lacked emotional and practical support. Researchers concluded that teaching faculty and nursing mentors empathy strategies would be invaluable in providing guidance through their academic journey. When students experience failure in a required nursing course, a decision to persevere and find ways to overcome obstacles and continue or quit nursing school is a turning point in the academic journey. Webb-Williams (2018) concluded that students found it helpful to give themselves pep talks for self-encouragement to try harder and persist in accomplishing the predetermined goal. Wright et al. (2016) confirmed a considerable increase in self-efficacy in individuals taught to utilize instructional self-statements. However, self-statements of negative talk can also lower self-efficacy. When a student is encouraged by a role model, the individual is more likely to face a challenge and retain the belief of achievement for future tasks. Therefore, self-efficacy diminishes if verbal persuasion is the only tool utilized to achieve personal competence or effective performance and therefore is unsuccessful.

Understanding the factors of student academic success may provide a framework to assist faculty and students in approaches to learning (Williams, 2018). Identifying the academic gap presents instructors with opportunities to modify the nursing curriculum and meet the needs of the students (Wiersma et al., 2020). Many students admitted into an ABSN program may not have completed specific science or medically related classes close to the time they entered the nursing program. Therefore, a need was discovered to explore the stories of the techniques, strategies, and perseverance methods utilized by students who have repeated ABSN nursing courses and have succeeded. By addressing this need, research can contribute to nursing education and strategies to assist nursing students in successfully retaking required courses and completing the ABSN program.
Further exploration of specific support strategies can provide faculty and administrators with the tools to help student success. In Australia, Doggrell and Schaffer (2016) looked to improve the retention of accelerated nursing students. Researchers invited students to join a workshop the week before the start of the semester. All students were given access to printable and audio lectures and lecture notes. Also provided was a reintroduction to topics like nutrition, anatomy, physiology, and medical terminology. The information gathered from this study supported and increased the retention rates of this group of nursing students.

The significance of retaining and assisting ABSN students is that the information will allow for the creation of effective learning techniques and coping strategies to promote and support student success, both personally and professionally. Burke et al. (2022) suggested that understanding the grit level of nursing students would allow faculty to obtain the skills needed to implement strategies throughout nursing education. Huffman et al. (2021) suggested frontline training may provide evaluation tools to help foster grit and resilience in health care providers. Before entering the health care environment, administration and nursing instructors can implement this same evaluation tool with nursing students.

**Methodological Choices in Designing the Study**

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that constructivism is the foundation of basic qualitative studies, guiding this research study. Adler (1997) described constructivism as a reality fashioned from the human mind and how it generates meaning from specific experiences and ideas. The combination of a constructivist philosophy and a qualitative format provided a personalized perspective of the academic journey of ABSN students. Each research method allows the researcher to gather detailed information in various ways. The basis of qualitative research methodology focuses primarily on how people interpret their experiences in the world.
in which they are a part and the description of those experiences (Holloway & Galvin, 2017). As participants are studied utilizing a qualitative method, the human side of life is not lost in statistical equations (Taylor et al., 2016). Quantitative research uses numbers for measurement, whereas qualitative research focuses on the study participants’ human perceptions and lived experiences (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Mixed method research gathers quantitative and qualitative information for combined integration to analyze the data and understand the research topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Nursing education is recognized as an applied field of practice in which qualitative research is a frequent method of study. The qualitative design allowed for the collection of rich narratives of the participants’ experiences and strategies for success in an ABSN program.

Synthesis of the Research Findings

Although grit and perseverance were acknowledged as success indicators in nursing education, a comprehensive literature review recognized a gap when referring to ABSN students and strategies utilized to achieve success. All facets of the chosen dissertation topic were reviewed in the literature. The elements examined were nursing needs and shortages, ABSN program criteria, factors influencing academic performance, well-being and academic success, persistence, resilience, and retention.

Research conducted on current and predictive nursing shortages is extensive, and the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded these shortages. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022) predicted an average of 194,500 registered nurse job openings annually over the next ten years. Although AACN (2020) reported a growth of 5.1% in nursing program enrollment, the increase will not be enough to meet the shortage of nurses and nursing faculty. The nursing shortage reverts to the impact of academic success and nursing program faculty availability.
Ulrich (2021) emphasized that the nursing shortage will not end when the pandemic passes. Although the nursing shortage was predicted within the Baby Boomer nursing community, it has escalated dramatically since 2020. McLernon (2020) recognized that new graduate nurses are entering the health care industry and immediately filling positions in intensive care units due to the deficit. These new nurses may not be prepared to face rapid changes that include new medications, modified protocols, and fewer resources (Huffman et al., 2021). In addition, nursing students and new nurses do not have the same problem-focused coping skills as seasoned nurses, creating an uncertain outcome regarding nursing students completing their education and entering the nursing profession.

ABSN programs were designed for individuals that achieved baccalaureate degrees in other disciplines and sought to gain a second degree in nursing (McKenna & Brooks, 2018). Individuals accepted into ABSN programs are adults who have completed a bachelor’s or graduate degree in a non-nursing field and desire to transition into nursing. Although ABSN students are viewed as self-directed and internally motivated, they still may experience a disconnect between their initial baccalaureate degree and the job skills required in nursing. The curriculum within an ABSN program is fast-paced for earlier completion, with an intense, stressful curriculum. Retention of students following entry into an ABSN program is vital to producing nurses ready to enter the health care industry. Students who complete nursing programs pursue the desired licensure by taking the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX). There is a question of whether accurate information and statistics exist for students repeating courses in an ABSN program. For example, research determined that although governing agencies in North Carolina compile nursing student information relating to demographics, academic completion, and NCLEX first-time pass rate, the information regarding
students who repeat courses is not reported (McKenna & Brooks, 2018). Further research by Lewis et al. (2022) suggested the need for additional studies on a national level on repeating student statistics. Finding the connections between risk factors, attributions, and student repeaters may provide other data that has not been reported, prompting further research possibilities.

Tinto (2016) stated that educational factors, social factors, student backgrounds, demographics, and lived experiences all factored into student success. The literature revealed some factors, including faculty feedback, support, and communication, as warranted themes (Berk, 2018; Bhurtun et al., 2021; Elmir et al., 2019; Williams, 2020). Nonacademic factors included financial restraints, family and work scheduling conflicts, poor time management, technology struggles, and challenges with writing skills and the rigor of an ABSN program (Chavan et al., 2019; Meyer et al., 2021; Smith-Wacholz et al., 2019). Cadet’s (2021) investigations revealed that many characteristics could impact success, including culture, gender, motivation, self-efficacy, and self-persistence. Although studies identified contributing factors to failure, and the need to help students overcome obstacles, there was no reference to how students were to achieve this or if they had eventually achieved success. Students’ stories of the perception of individual experiences and descriptions of techniques and resources used to accomplish success are frequently not captured.

The progression from nursing student to full-time registered nurse is overwhelming, especially when the atmosphere in the health care industry is shorthanded and stressful. Gurkova and Zelenikova (2018) documented that prolonged periods of stress negatively impacted academic performance, student success, and individual student well-being. Nursing students repeatedly reported higher stress levels that ultimately affect their academic and clinical performance and overall well-being (Spurr et al., 2021). The concept of nursing burnout
indicates a negative perception of the healthcare environment and promotes the decision to leave the nursing profession. The ANA (2015) Code of Ethics and the ICN (2012) Code of Ethics support and reiterate the importance of self-care and well-being for nurses to provide the best care for patients. Although it may not be possible to eliminate the causes of stress for nursing students, faculty may be able to assist students in self-care techniques. These self-care techniques will aid in developing effective coping strategies in nursing school and later as registered nurses enter the health care environment.

The significance of the topic of retaining, assisting, and overall success of second-degree learners in an ABSN nursing program is critical to the nursing education specialty. Huffman et al. (2021) suggested frontline training may provide evaluation tools to help foster grit and resilience in health care providers. Before entering the health care environment, administration and nursing instructors can implement this same evaluation tool with nursing students. This dissertation study was anticipated to provide vital, personal information to faculty members, administrators, and other practitioners interested in student success and retention within an ABSN program.

Academic and nonacademic factors of success and failure are often identified in educational progression and retention studies. ABSN students and their stories of the perception of individual experiences and description of techniques and resources used to accomplish success are frequently not captured. Based on the increasing number of students in ABSN programs, it is essential to understand these experiences to foster change and provide additional support.

**Critique of Previous Research Methods**

The literature review on ABSN students and their stories of persistence included three primary research methods: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method studies. Methodology
refers to the process when the researcher chooses the research design and justifies why a particular design is pertinent to the research study (King et al., 2019). The research reviewed was distributed somewhat evenly among the research methods and techniques. Researchers should strive for credibility throughout all aspects of the research study, including creating the study, collecting the data, analyzing the data, and presenting the study’s findings (Hoque et al., 2017).

In this literature review, quantitative methods utilized tools such as the Grit Scale. The peer-reviewed studies were validated for accuracy, and if any changes or modifications were made, it was predominantly due to adjustment of response numbers. Qualitative methodology utilized case studies, personal interviews, and surveys. The mixed methods studies compiled the information from both research aspects to determine the need for academic intervention and the impact of the data on success and failure within education. It allowed for the analysis of data from different perspectives.

**Quantitative Critique**

Quantitative research observes a sample population acquiring phenomena and their effects on that specific population (Allen, 2017). In various topics related to the Grit Scale, entry qualifications, student debt, failure rates, and levels of stress and burnout, the majority of this research was conducted using quantitative methods (Alhadabi & Karpinski, 2020; Bhurtun et al., 2021; Burke et al., 2022; Chavan et al., 2019; DiMattio & Hudacek, 2020; Doggrell & Schaffer, 2016; Dube & Mlotshwa, 2018; Hodge et al., 2018; Huang et al., 2020; Kacan & Pallos, 2021; Lin et al., 2021; Meyer et al., 2021; Musso et al., 2019). Online surveys utilized objective questions and gained detailed information from participants (Dube & Mlotshwa, 2018; Huang et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2021). Limitations were acknowledged regarding factors influencing academic performance improvement through access to deeper information via a qualitative
study. DiMattio and Hudacek (2020) conducted a secondary analysis from a more extensive study in 2016. Although the sample began with 230 Generation Z students, the regression analysis decreased to 202 cases due to missing data. Bhurtun et al. (2021) referred to previous literature on stress, and coping strategies, noting that quantitative studies were successfully utilized with the Coping Behaviour Inventory (CBI), Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), and the questionnaires. Researchers recognized limitations regarding participants living in Finland and using only first and second study year students. Correlations between coping strategies and stress factors over an extended time period were suggested for future study, so nursing faculty may acquire the necessary tools to encourage well-being in their nursing students. Sample sizes of these quantitative studies ranged from 108 participants to 1020 participants.

**Qualitative Critique**

Qualitative research design provides an opportunity to allow full and complete experiences to be told and focus primarily on how people interpret their experiences (Holloway & Galvin, 2017). When individuals are studied utilizing a qualitative research method, the human side of life is not obscured among statistical equations (Taylor et al., 2016). Some researchers chose to document the real life perceptions of students and faculty of academic and nonacademic factors that impacted success or failure within an ABSN program and its future significance in the health care industry (Green, 2020; Marthiensen et al., 2019; Smith-Wacholz et al., 2019; ten Hoeve et al., 2017; Wiersma et al., 2020). Qualitative research gathers data until saturation or redundancy is achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, the sample sizes of participants in the reviewed qualitative studies ranged from five participants to 24 participants, which is appropriate for this method.
Using an exploratory qualitative design with face-to-face interviews, Bakker et al. (2019) explored 11 nursing students and their late dropout experiences. Two core themes were identified through analysis as a misconception of reality and expectations and a feeling of being in a downward spiral. The strengths of the study included detailed accounts relating specifically to late dropouts. Limitations included only one interviewee that was male. The researchers suggested further studies to develop intervention programs with support and coaching opportunities that may aid their retention.

Elmir et al. (2019) conducted a study at one of the largest universities in Australia. Nine students participated in semistructured interviews about the failure of one or more nursing courses. Data were transcribed and analyzed when saturation was achieved and revealed four themes and eight subthemes. Although Elmir et al. (2019) acquired rich data, a recognized limitation was that the data was only from one university. The sample size was appropriate for a qualitative research method. The study results concluded that nursing students might have different dispositions than other students finding that they have the desire, tenacity, and resilience to continue after failing a required course. Further research is suggested for support strategies.

Jarosinski et al. (2022) studied the nursing faculty shortage and its impact on the worldwide nursing shortage. Two researchers recruited participants utilizing emails and word of mouth and then conducted interviews in a semi-structured manner. The researchers were actively involved in the analysis, where four themes emerged. Strengths of the study included detailed field notes and meeting minutes and the variety and inclusion of community, private, and state colleges and universities. Limitations included using note-taking, where some wording may have
been missed. The researchers encouraged additional studies to include the nursing faculty shortage after COVID-19.

**Mixed Methods Critique**

The mixed method studies within the literature review sought to combine both research methods to draw off the strengths of each and gain a better understanding of the research problem (Ali-Abadi et al., 2021; Bartlett et al., 2016; Brook et al., 2021; Cadet, 2021; Huffman et al., 2021; Iheduru-Anderson, 2021; Lewis et al., 2019; Snow, 2016; Zajac & Lane, 2020). When utilizing a mixed method design, in-depth knowledge is achieved from qualitative and quantitative methods complimenting each other (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Combining methods can assist the research team when a challenging research topic involves multiple levels of understanding (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). It is also fair to note that combining multiple methodologies can contribute to bias, lack of rigor, and inaccuracy. Limitations within these studies related to sample size, area, locations, diversity, and lack of focus on nursing students specifically.

**Summary**

The research presented many articles that provided valid, helpful information to readers and was evaluative. The articles reviewed addressed topics of nursing shortages, self-care, resilience and grit, character, and the mindsets of nursing students (AACN, 2019; Berk, 2018; Jones-Schenk, 2018; Buerhaus, 2021; Duckworth, 2016; Haddad et al., 2022; Linton & Koonmen, 2020; McCabe, 2016; Spurlock, 2020; Stoffel & Cain, 2018; Ulrich, 2021; Wei et al., 2021; Williams, 2020). Often the researchers continued to acknowledge the need for further research on the chosen topic.
Although most research reviewed provided valuable input across many methods, several ideas dominated the need for further study. ABSN and other nursing students often were not viewed independently from other student populations. Understanding transitional experiences are essential, given the increasing number of students in second degree accelerated nursing programs (Read & Laschinger, 2017). This dissertation study explored what factors impacted students that persevered through the ABSN program after repeating required courses and how students and faculty may acquire additional techniques and suggestions for success. The following chapter will include information on how the dissertation study was conducted to answer this issue.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Rutberg and Bouikidis (2018) stated that qualitative research focuses on studying participants' human perceptions and lived experiences. A basic qualitative study was chosen for this dissertation to explore what strategies Accelerated Baccalaureate of Science Nursing (ABSN) students used to overcome obstacles to complete required nursing courses. Chapter 3 contains essential information about the purpose of the study, the research question, the research design, the population and participant selection, the procedures used for conducting the study, and ethical considerations related to the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore what strategies repeat students described they used to overcome obstacles and complete ABSN courses. ABSN programs assist in meeting the growing demand for bedside baccalaureate prepared registered nurses. However, the research is limited and intensely focused on academic factors influencing student success within the program (Schwartz & Gambescia, 2017). Academic factors, nonacademic factors, and understanding of transitional experiences are vital given the increasing numbers of students in second degree accelerated nursing programs (Read & Laschinger, 2017). Therefore, this research aimed to determine what strategies ABSN students used to overcome obstacles in their educational journey. Williams et al. (2018) found that the climate of the learning institution and its psychological, social, and cultural variables significantly impacted the student's satisfaction
and success. Student perceptions contribute to understanding how and why a student persists when facing obstacles, struggles, and failures. The research may provide needed information for nursing faculty and administrators in their quest for student retention measures. Duckworth (2016) anticipated that understanding how a student persists in the face of struggles and the characteristics required for success will provide insight into academic persistence (Duckworth, 2016).

**Research Question**

What strategies do repeat students describe they used to overcome obstacles and complete ABSN courses?

**Research Design**

The dissertation topic was established to understand better what factors drive nursing students to continue in an ABSN program after failing courses. There was a compelling passion for discovering and exploring what drives nursing students to continue. Perseverance and perception signify qualitative research because these qualities cannot be quantitatively measured (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). A basic qualitative design was the chosen method for this study that investigated stories of perseverance and perceptions of the participants' experiences. Although qualitative research is limited to a particular topic, it provides detailed, descriptive information about the research topic (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). The qualitative approach combined rich, detailed descriptions with creative inquiry to address issues and perspectives subjectively from participants (Creswell & Creswell-Baez, 2021).

Qualitative research identifies with the heart of the participants involved and gives a human voice to the science when gathering data (Squires & Dorsen, 2018). This method allowed participants to share strong narratives, ideas, and inspirations for persistence. Constructivism is
the foundation of this basic qualitative research study. Adler (1997) described constructivism as a reality constructed from the human mind and how it generates meaning from specific experiences and ideas. Therefore, combining a qualitative method with an underlying philosophy of constructivism provided the perspective of how students persevered in the ABSN program setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2016).

The qualitative approach allows researchers to gather information based on the participants' descriptions of their lived realities and experiences (Graneheim et al., 2017). Ehrmin and Pierce (2021) found that qualitative research enables the presentation of data and concepts to be "more easily understood and learner-friendly" (p. 41). Utilizing a qualitative research method supplied insight into the academic and nonacademic factors that influenced perceived challenges and obstacles in an ABSN program. The researcher acted as the primary instrument to gather rich data for collection and analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Perceptions, feelings, and experiences guided the knowledge obtained from this dissertation study to better understand the mindset of ABSN students. Comprehension or apperception will allow for changes and improvements.

**Target Population and Sample**

Understanding the difference between a target population and sampling is imperative. For instance, college students could represent the required population in this study. The sample would be the individuals who participated in the research and provided the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). ABSN students were explicitly recruited for sampling because they had experienced the phenomenon to help inform the research (Creswell & Creswell-Baez, 2021).
Population

The target population in this study was baccalaureate nursing students who have repeated a required nursing course. The target population was filtered based on the inability to fit the criteria required. The larger population from which the participants were drawn were baccalaureate nursing students. Therefore, of the larger population, the ABSN students provided the most accurate, helpful information (Asiamah et al., 2017). Currently, there are 282 ABSN programs available in 49 states, with the prospect of 30 additional programs in developmental stages (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2020).

According to the AACN (2020), nursing school enrollment increased by 5.6% in 2020 despite the COVID pandemic. However, the pandemic created a shortage of faculty and access to clinical sites, which resulted in over 80,000 potential students being turned away. Even with those who were refused, nursing programs continue to show enrollment growth over a 15-year period (AACN, 2020).

Sample

Utilizing a purposeful sample allows readers to connect with the information gathered (Seidman, 2019). The rationale for purposeful sampling is the ability to select rich, informative experiences to understand the explored topic (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Purposeful sampling was initiated to procure the selection of participants and best inform the subject of this research study (Creswell & Creswell-Baez, 2021). The most appropriate samples from the target population are those individuals who can provide the most accurate data (Asiamah et al., 2017). The purposive sampling was drawn from students that had attended an ABSN program and experienced failure in a required nursing class.
The purposeful sample was collected nationwide from various ABSN students, with the anticipated number of 10 to 15 students, or until saturation was achieved. The purposive sampling was drawn from students that had attended an ABSN program and experienced failure in a required nursing course. The gathering of data from participants experiencing similar situations gave intense power to the stories allowing for a reduced number of participants (Seidman, 2019). In qualitative research, the sample size is established when data gathered from participants becomes repetitive or often referred to as reaching saturation (Creswell & Creswell-Baez, 2021). Also, including a sufficient number of participants that reflect the desired population representation (Seidman, 2019).

**Inclusion Criteria**

Demographic information collected contained age, gender, and educational experiences to ensure that participants met the inclusion criteria. To have the attributes necessary to participate in this research study, each participant verified that they were a current ABSN student or had been an ABSN student for at least two semesters in the past 5 years. At some point in the ABSN program, they did not progress to the next level due to failing a required nursing course and continued or completed the program.

**Exclusion Criteria**

The exclusion criteria encompassed nursing students that were not currently enrolled in an ABSN program or had not been enrolled in an ABSN program over the past 5 years. Students that had not failed a required nursing course in an ABSN program would not qualify. Students that failed a required nursing course and did not continue through the ABSN program also were not suitable to participate.
Procedures

The overall purpose of research is to allow individuals to enhance their knowledge and gain exposure to different opinions and viewpoints (King et al., 2019). The following section includes descriptions of the elements used to examine the experiences of ABSN students that repeated a course during their academic journey. It consists of the details for recruitment, selection, and protection and confidentiality of the participants. In addition, a detailed account of data collection and analysis methods was provided.

Participant Selection

The recruitment process began with direct inquiries to multiple Facebook pages relating to nursing, nursing students, ABSN students, and nursing research pages. Approval was obtained from Capella University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to recruit the purposive sample. IRB approval included a recruitment flyer that stated the study title, the research focus, criteria for inclusion and exclusion, detailed steps for those interested in volunteering for the study, and researcher contact information. Permission was obtained from Facebook page administrators to post the research study flyer for volunteer recruitment. The approved flyer was also posted to the researcher’s personal social media pages, including Facebook and LinkedIn, with a nonprivate setting asking for volunteers to participate in the research study. Social media allows interaction and communication opportunities on a larger platform with enhanced community outreach (Carr et al., 2019). Others further shared this flyer on social media interested in the research or knowing someone who may fit the study's criteria. This network sampling or snowball sampling allowed for the approved flyer to be shared over and over, forging a snowball effect (Billups, 2021).
The IRB approved recruitment flyer was distributed to publicly available faculty email addresses at universities that offered ABSN programs. Included in the email was a request for faculty to distribute the approved flyer to enrolled ABSN students at their discretion. Potential volunteers were provided with the researcher's contact information. Included in all documents were instructions to contact the researcher via email to determine if the students were interested in volunteering for the research study and if inclusion criteria were met. If the volunteer did not meet the selection criteria, they were thanked for their time and interest.

Utilizing the volunteers' preferred contact method, and after feasibility was established, a Capella University approved stamped informed consent was emailed via DocuSign for review and signature. When the signed and completed informed consent was received, follow-up communication was initiated to answer any questions the participant may have. A Zoom or telephone meeting was scheduled at the participant's convenience for data collection. At the initiation of each interview, participants were asked to verify and provide verbal consent for recording. Permission was requested from the participants for the researcher to initiate further contact with them to confirm any information received in the interview or for additional clarification.

**Protection of Participants**

Ethical considerations and participant protection in research studies involve the participant's right to understand the informed consent, the parameters of their participation, the anonymity and confidentiality of the data, and the assurance of the researcher to protect their information (Billups, 2021). Each participant in this dissertation study read, signed, and returned an informed consent that had received prior Capella University IRB approval. In addition to articulating the purpose of the study, the informed consent also reinforced that the participant
could withdraw from the study at any time. All completed consent forms were filed and stored in a locked safe only accessible by the research and utilized for this purpose alone.

At the initiation of the interview, participants were asked to confirm that they still wanted to participate in the research study and that they were aware that the interview was being recorded, reinforcing their readiness to initiate participation. Interviews were conducted via Zoom. During the interview process, headphones were also utilized to promote additional privacy and confidentiality. Using headphones allowed the researcher to focus on nonverbal mannerisms and the tone and speed of the participant's speech. These nonverbal cues may hint at the rapport between the researcher and participant and how comfortable the participants are with sharing their personal experiences (Billups, 2021). The researcher transcribed all interviews from the audio recordings. All names and identifying factors were replaced with alphanumeric coding to preserve anonymity and confidentiality. For additional protection, all audio recorded files, participant data sheets, digitally signed informed consents, and transcribed interview documents were all stored on a password protected laptop used only for the purpose of this research study. All paper copies of signed consents along with interview transcriptions and notes were stored in a locked file cabinet in the private home office of the researcher. Confidentiality and anonymity were preserved at all times. All research files will be electronically erased from the laptop, and all paper copies of data will be shredded at the end of 7 years.

**Expert Review**

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that an expert review is suggested to validate the quality of interview questions and processes. An expert review can provide an opportunity for feedback to improve the data collection and interview mechanism (Hanafizadeh & Shaikh, 2021). Before beginning the data collection process, three experts were enlisted to review the semi-structured
interview questions presented in this dissertation study. The experts were all university professors. Two of the reviewers had PhD's in nursing education, had taught research on the bachelor's and master's levels for over 10 years, and were instrumental in writing research and nursing curriculum. The third reviewer carried a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction. This expert had served as a master's level research advisor for more than 300 master's level students, in addition to performing consulting work for state and national accrediting agencies that included designing and delivering products that would address clarity and specificity in inquiry items including interview questions. The three experts had served as readers and advisors for more than 50 doctoral students.

All expert reviewers agreed that the interview questions were open-ended, unbiased, and applicable to the research topic and question. The feedback received from two of the nursing education experts suggested modifying the wording of one of the questions so that it allowed the participant to provide more specific information. After the recommendation was adopted, the reviewers approved and offered a consensual agreement.

Data Collection

The process of data collection began after receiving the signed and completed informed consent from the participant. Qualifying participants were contacted through the private email address they provided to set up a Zoom meeting at their earliest convenience. Zoom, a video conferencing platform, allowed interviewing and data collection while overcoming geographical restraints that otherwise may have existed (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). This interview technology allowed facial expressions, voice inflection, and a degree of body language noted by the researcher. Participants were also reminded that the researcher would record all interviews and advised that additional notes would be taken. The researcher took notes on individual
question sheets created for this purpose. A few interviews were done via telephone and recorded on a handheld recorder due to participant difficulties accessing Zoom.

Each interview ranged from 20 to 45 minutes based on the depth and detail of the information the participant wanted to share and where the conversation was led. An introduction was provided to put the participant at ease, and a rapport was established, allowing the participant to feel comfortable and enable positive interaction (King et al., 2019). Participants were asked to verify that they still wanted to participate in the study and instructed about the interview process flow. All participants were asked preapproved semistructured, open-ended interview questions. The question sequence was adjusted based on how the interview evolved to encourage participants to speak freely and share their personal experiences (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Additional probing questions were asked if further details or clarification of the experience were needed. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were asked if they had any other questions and were thanked for their time and willingness to participate in the research study.

Data Analysis

After the participant interviews were completed, audio recordings were transcribed in a consistent style and printed for analysis. Although time-consuming, verbatim transcription was utilized as a preferred choice. Seidman (2019) suggested that when researchers transcribe audio recorded interviews, it allows an additional opportunity to hear and become further immersed in the material serving as the initial step of data analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that data should be heuristic by providing information or content that pertains to the research topic.

Belotto (2018) encouraged continual data review to become more familiar with its contents. On three separate occasions, the transcripts were read and reviewed without any
notations being made to focus on the words and feelings that ascended from the transcript. Next, individual transcripts were reread, and comments, notes, and items thought to be important to the research topic were placed in the margins. Using an inductive coding process, codes were recognized and notated using a color coded system. Coding identifies topics, problems, similarities, and differences that reveal themselves during the interview process (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The inductive data analysis allowed the researcher to compare and group data to assign codes and identify themes. Field notes served as an additional source of information to facilitate the coding process. The inductive analysis allowed the identification of patterns and regularities in coding, which then developed themes from the data (Billups, 2021). After color coding the transcripts, an Excel spreadsheet was created listing assigned codes that promoted and formulated the development of themes. Categories or themes are conceptions taken from the data source. Marshall and Rossman (2016) described these categories or themes as buckets where data pieces are placed. When assigning code words to the transcription data, it created categories that were later grouped (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After themes were compiled and listed, field notes were incorporated into the data bank allowing for further richness and individualization.

**Instruments**

Research instruments are tools utilized when collecting and analyzing data related to a research study topic. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) felt that because understanding is the goal of qualitative research, the human instrument is the ideal tool to collect and interpret data. Because knowledge of personal experiences is difficult to gather, qualitative researchers advocate using open-ended research instruments (Madondo, 2021). In qualitative research, the researcher is often referred to as an instrument of the study (Billups, 2021). Other instruments used to gather
data were in-depth interviews using an interview guide containing open-ended, semistructured questions formulated by the researcher.

**The Role of the Researcher**

Qualitative research is guided by *thick description*, a term developed by Clifford Geertz (1973). Thick descriptions from participant interviews provided readers with information and in-depth explanations so that the settings can be understood and opinions can be formed about the research and researcher's interpretations (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The researcher's goal was to understand the meaning of the data gathered from participants. To achieve this objective, the researcher served as the primary instrument in data collection and analysis using understanding, description, communication, and interpretation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Creswell and Poth (2018) maintained that the researcher is the one who creates a bridge in the gap between the data collected and the participant. Billups (2021) expressed that the researcher builds a personal, intimate working relationship with the participants to gather meaningful data through shared experiences. Therefore, the researcher serves as the instrument which merges with the tools used to collect that data.

Nurses strive to provide patient-centered care stimulated by probing questions and active skilled listening. Nurses observe and interpret verbal and nonverbal information through the admitting and interview process as a technique for building rapport with patients. The same interviewing skills were utilized as a researcher while also adjusting to the responses from the participants in the research study. Textbooks were referenced for more detailed interview understanding and technique modification. These invaluable resources included Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), Browne and Keely (2015), Hewson et al. (2016), and King et al. (2019).
Coursework at Capella University throughout the dissertation journey provided additional practice, learning, and experiences through the required curriculum. Opportunities include, but were not limited to, research process understanding, writing designs, methodologies, interview opportunities, face-to-face interaction through academic residencies, and virtual online communication with peers and instructors. The researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), an online training certification suggested by Goodell et al. (2016), and fulfilled an academic curriculum requirement of Capella University.

Preparation for the role of researcher included working as a nurse for over 15 years in multiple settings. As a nurse educator, this researcher taught on various platforms across several nursing program tracks for over seven years. Interviewing is a learned skill that improves with time, understanding the experience of listening closely and recognizing the direction the interview is moving toward (King et al., 2019). Nurses often hone their skills in identifying patterns and interpreting data in qualitative research through clinical practice interactions (Buetow, 2019). Patient narratives aid nurses in understanding expectations and possibilities as well as potential barriers (Bostrom et al., 2020). Working as a nurse and nurse educator allowed the researcher to draw from the previous circumstances, allowing for a deeper understanding and attentiveness to participant experiences.

Bias and preconceptions were identified and monitored in data collection analysis through self-reflection, journaling, and affirmation (Galdas, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher interpreted data considering alternate explanations and opinions in ways other than those that support the researcher's views (MacDermid, 2017). Participants were offered the opportunity for member checks to confirm transcription accuracy.
Guiding Interview Questions

This research study used a semi-structured interview technique. The semistructured questions were primarily open-ended, general questions that included additional exploratory questions prompted by the participant's perspective of the discussion or reaction. Moser and Korstjens (2018) recommended that the question sequence or script be predetermined and adjusted based on how the interview evolved while encouraging participants to speak freely and share their personal experiences. The researcher conducted field testing utilizing an expert panel review to verify the interview questions met the criteria stated. The researcher carefully considered aligning the research problem and question when developing interview questions.

Listed below are the research-designed guiding interview questions:

1. How would you describe your expectations of the chosen accelerated baccalaureate program of nursing (ABSN) prior to attending?
2. Did you find that the ABSN program was a different experience than your previous educational experiences?
3. Please tell me about your experience with the ABSN program.
4. What part of the ABSN program met your expectations?
5. What part of the ABSN program did not meet your expectations?
6. Please give me some examples of what factors you feel may have contributed to your lack of success in the ABSN program.
7. Tell me what you believe would have helped you be successful in the ABSN program.
8. Have you completed your ABSN program or any other program since your ABSN experience? If yes, what type of program?
As recommended by Goodell et al. (2016), the following unstructured cues were implemented depending on participant direction to gain more detailed responses and insights:

- Could you tell me more about that?
- How did you feel that was helpful?
- How would you have done things differently?
- Do you feel that was the best decision/choice at the time?
- If someone wanted to go to nursing school and asked you about the ABSN program, what would you tell them?

Questions 1 through 5 gathered information regarding critical areas of the research study while allowing participant perspectives. Questions 6, 7, and 8 were probing questions that allowed additional depth in collecting interview data. Questions 6 and 7, along with the added unstructured questions when applicable, directly answered the research question.

**Ethical Considerations**

Capella University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this dissertation study’s completion. Ethical considerations included participant understanding of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity (Billups, 2021). Informed consents were completed and collected from all participants and secured in a locked safe only accessible to the researcher. All communication and data compiled were stored in a locked safe and on a password-protected computer utilized only for this research study and exclusively by the researcher. During data collection, analysis, and transcription, de-identification was achieved by assigning alphanumeric designations (P-1, P-2, etc.) to participants. Transcription was done by the researcher and followed the same guidelines stated previously. Site locations were also de-identified, utilizing the organization in its place. The researcher submitted the required documentation to Capella
University by uploading it to the University management system through a password-protected forum only procurable to the researcher and the assigned dissertation mentor and committee. When actively engaging in a research study, the participant should have no doubts that all data is secured and that any identifying information is concealed (King et al., 2019). The researcher maintained confidentiality at all times. The participants were not vulnerable or part of an at-risk population. The researcher maintained ethical guidelines demonstrating respect and justice for participants and beneficence in the research technique (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

Connelly (2016) and Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) suggested various techniques to establish credibility within qualitative research, including a lengthy interaction with the participants, reflective journaling, and reexaminining data multiple times to present a thick description to the reader. Dependability ensured the research contained descriptive procedure and researcher notes of all activities and decisions made during the study, including participants, questions, and detailed processes (Connelly, 2016). Dependability allowed the methods outlined within the research and the data analysis to be evaluated for quality. Transferability allows the details of the study and its conclusions to be applied to another similar setting (King et al., 2019). Transferability was achieved through analysis, knowing that the data would similarly represent the results if taken from a larger population.

Due to personalization and the in-depth nature of the qualitative research study, it is imperative to address ethical considerations throughout the research and analysis process (Arifin, 2018). Qualitative methods necessitate the researcher to be cautious and aware that often what is exposed may be different than what the researcher anticipated when beginning the study journey.
Recognizing bias implications through personal beliefs, expectations, assumptions, opinions, questions, and reporting is valuable and necessary. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) realized that eliminating biases may be unrealistic, but identifying bias was helpful. Journaling is a spontaneous practice that helps distinguish between the participant's and the researcher's views (Billups, 2021). The researcher shared feelings and questions with the university assigned mentor, who assisted in mitigating unanticipated biases during the interview and analysis process. There was no conflict of interest between the researcher and the participants because the participants were not students of the researcher and did not attend the university where the researcher was employed.

**Summary**

This research study aimed to understand how nursing students who have repeated required courses persevered and ultimately succeeded in an ABSN program. A basic qualitative study design was chosen because it allowed one-on-one opportunities to gather information in a detailed format from the participants. The qualitative research method allowed the participants to share rich narratives of experiences through personal insights, meanings, and interpretations while addressing the research question. Chapter 3 presented the methodology, purpose of the study, research question and design, sampling, procedures, tools utilized by the researcher, and ethical considerations identified and maintained. Chapter 4 will present the data and the findings of the analysis.
CHAPTER 4. PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

Multiple factors can serve as predictors of success or failure in a student’s academic journey. The purpose of this dissertation was to conduct a basic qualitative research study of what strategies repeat students describe they used to overcome obstacles and complete accelerated baccalaureate of nursing (ABSN) courses. Chapter 4 highlights further detail regarding the research and the rationale of how the researcher chose the topic of the research study. The chapter continues with a detailed description of the participants and applies the basic qualitative methodology. The remainder of the chapter will address data analysis and research findings.

Introduction: The Study and the Researcher

Many factors can impact success or failure in undergraduate programs. Academic facets, social factors, demographics, and personal experiences may contribute to the success or failure of the accelerated baccalaureate nursing student. ABSN students have achieved academic success in other undergraduate programs and are often viewed as self-directed and internally motivated. Still, these students may also encounter challenges related to a new quicker-paced learning environment, a disconnect between their initial baccalaureate degree and current job skills related to nursing, and altered expectations relating to the nursing profession (El-Banna et al., 2017). This dissertation was inspired by the desire of the researcher to understand better what factors drive and motivate ABSN students to continue in the program after they have failed a required nursing course. The intended purpose of this study was to contribute to the literature on
obstacles students experienced in an ABSN program and the strategies these students utilized to attain success. Understanding varied properties of student academic success may provide a framework for students and faculty in approaches to learning and strategies for success. Understanding student success is imperative, considering the current need for qualified, baccalaureate-prepared nurses to serve communities worldwide.

In preparation for this dissertation research study, the researcher completed multiple required research classes at Capella University. The courses gave the researcher the necessary knowledge to design and analyze content for this qualitative dissertation study. The researcher also attained certification by completing the Collaborative Institute Training Initiative (CITI) and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Because the researcher has been a nurse educator for over eight years, further steps were initiated during data collection and analysis that mitigated personal bias, including journaling. Additionally, the researcher is a registered nurse with considerable experience in interviewing patients for healthcare data collection and analysis utilizing critical thinking skills and judgment. These skills contributed to successful interviewing and data collection.

**Description of the Sample**

All participants in this study repeated one or more required nursing courses in the ABSN program. Potential participants were recruited through permissions obtained from social media nursing student/nursing pages, private posting on the researcher’s Linked In page, and emails sent directly to nurse educators and program directors of midwestern ABSN programs. Volunteers responded, and snowball sampling occurred. Of the volunteers that expressed interest, requests were declined based on exclusion criteria. Initially, 12 participants were interviewed for this study; however, after further review, one volunteer was eliminated based on
exclusion criteria. Qualified participants interviewed totaled 11 (n=11). Saturation was achieved after nine interviews. However, two additional interviews were conducted to verify saturation and provide a rich narrative. Participants included two males and nine females, ranging in age from 28 to 45, with a mean age of 35. Nine participants were located in the Midwest, and two participants resided in the Pacific Northwest. The confidentiality of each participant was ensured by assigning an established code, P-1, P-2, etc. This code was utilized when compiling data and research results.

After receiving signed consent forms from the participants, interview dates and times were established at the convenience of the participant. Ten participants consented to interview via Zoom, an online audio and web conferencing platform, and one participant was interviewed via telephone due to connectivity issues where the participant was located. Permission was then received from the participant to record the interview utilizing a handheld recorder. Participants were again asked to verify their willingness to participate in the study and consent to the interview audio recording. The 10 participants using the Zoom platform voluntarily activated their cameras, allowing the researcher to notate facial expressions and body language. All participants consented to be audio recorded on the Zoom platform. The length of the interviews ranged from approximately 20 to 45 minutes, averaging 26 minutes.

**Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis**

A basic qualitative research study was conducted to answer the research question of what strategies repeat students describe they use to overcome obstacles and complete ABNS courses. Interviews were implemented with a question guide containing preapproved semistructured, open-ended questions with probing follow-up questions to gain detailed, descriptive, rich narratives from participants. Interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Word, and applicable
codes were assigned for referencing data. The transcripts were read entirely through with no notes taken. This review allowed the researcher to absorb the information and become more comfortable and familiar with the data. The recordings of the interviews were also listened to again to notate voice inflection and tone and verify the transcription’s accuracy.

With the method of inductive coding in mind, the transcripts were read multiple times in search of common terms or phrases. Notes were made in the margins flagging these terms and phrases. The transcripts were reviewed a second time to allow reexamination of the data. An Excel spreadsheet was created to determine the frequency of terms and phrases used and participant codes were labeled. By hand coding the interview transcripts, the researcher could identify and label similar topics, phrases, and verbiage to reveal categories or codes. For each participant, 11 to 20 codes were recognized, with 31 codes emerging for all the participants combined. The codes were further examined relating to the research question, and four themes emerged. The inductive analysis resulted in the discovery of the data’s meaning and transition into themes that provided insight into the research question. Assigned codes were interjected in a concept map format (see Appendix A) and color coded to recognize themes that materialized from the coded groups. A Microsoft Word document was created, aligning the codes with related themes, as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1
Codes and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS</th>
<th>OBSTACLES</th>
<th>SUCCESS STRATEGIES</th>
<th>PARTICIPANT GUIDANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACADEMIC</td>
<td>ACADEMIC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast-paced</td>
<td>Adaptive learning</td>
<td>Clinical/Hands On</td>
<td>Self-Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards</td>
<td>Bad Information</td>
<td>Don’t Quit/2nd Chance</td>
<td>Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Consuming</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Peer/Faculty Support</td>
<td>Family Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>Plan/Prep</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning Materials</td>
<td>Previous Experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stress/Anxiety</td>
<td>Resources/Academic Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Studying</td>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NON-ACADEMIC</td>
<td>NON-ACADEMIC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>Age/Maturity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids/Family</td>
<td>Past Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life</td>
<td>Mindset</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/Job</td>
<td>Nurse Dream</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The coding document was reviewed a third time verifying the content with field notes and journaling. Hand coding enabled further submersion in the data and unveiled the formation of themes. Transcripts were placed in a binder and reviewed for quotations related to codes and themes. No problems were encountered during the data analysis; therefore, there was no deviation from the proposed data analysis process.

Presentation of Data and Results of the Analysis

This research study was conducted to identify repeat students’ strategies to overcome obstacles and complete required ABSN nursing courses. Based on data analysis and inductive coding four themes emerged. The themes were: (a) program expectations, (b) obstacles, (c) success strategies, and (d) participant guidance.

Theme 1: Program Expectations
The first theme focused on program expectations, the participant’s understanding of the program requirements, and whether they felt that the program met those expectations. The theme was generated from five recognized codes. The five codes were: (a) fast-paced, (b) standards, (c) time-consuming, (d) communication, and (e) tutoring.

Participants eagerly shared varied opinions as they disclosed their perceptions of ABSN program expectations. Out of the 11 participants, four (P-1, P-7, P-9, P-10) felt that the program, as presented to them, met their expectations before admission. Six participants (P-2, P-4, P-5, P-6, P-8, P-11) felt their expectations were not met. Participant (P-12) felt that some expectations were met and some were not. This was an expected result because all participants repeated at least one class, which signified that the time frame presented for program completion was not met. Participant P-2 shared:

I think, first of all, for me, the program, at the time I was going through it, it was 16 to 18 credits a semester. I had never really taken more than 12 credits myself a semester. I think the expectation was we’re gonna take these nurses, and we’re gonna train them as quickly as possible because a certain group of people can actually do that. And I think the expectation was, well, everyone needs to be treated the same way and is expected to perform at the same academic level. I feel that the expectations that, that we were held to a very high standard there.

Participant P-5 shared, “It did not actually…I was expecting to have more time, more time in a particular clinical setting.” Participant P-6 passionately stated:

I was just like, wow, when I got in, it was a really different reality for me. I felt like I really needed to share this because a lot of students would never come out and really talk about it. I don’t believe in 16-month programs at this point, just because there’s so many
important facets of education that we need to incorporate into, you know, um, prevention, health prevention, and saving lives. I just don’t feel like it’s… it’s realistic.

Participant P-11 supported this by stating:

I would say no…plus the way they sold it, how they sold that school to me. That’s good for you, you are going to be done in 16 months, and people have done it. We offer tutors and stuff…but it wasn’t exactly like that.

Those that felt the program met their expectations shared these thoughts: Participant P-1 stated, “I expected it to be hard.” Participant P-7 acknowledged, “So I…what I was interested in is that it was 16 months, so a faster time.” Participant P-10 admitted, “I think I knew it would be challenging because it’s accelerated…but…I don’t know; I guess I expected a little more grace.”

Participant P-12 shared:

Yes, and no. I didn’t think that…I knew it would be intense and everything, but I didn’t think it would be like this picky. I guess what I’m trying to say, you know when you’re within like a tenth of a point to pass the class, and you fail. I didn’t think it would be like that, you know, and I mean, I would just think there would be some exceptions… you know, like with our pharmacology. You have the calculations in that class. So if you fail the calculations test but pass everything else, you still fail the course.

Theme 2: Obstacles

Participants reflected and thoughtfully shared examples of factors or obstacles that they felt may have contributed to their lack of success in the ABSN. Perceptions of obstacles understandably varied among the participants based on their personal situations and experiences. Therefore, the obstacle theme was divided into two sub-themes: academic and nonacademic factors. Some academic factors that contributed to the identification of codes were: (a) adaptive
learning, (b) misinformation, (c) communication, (d) curriculum, (e) face-to-face, (f) learning materials, (g) stress/anxiety, and (h) studying. Nonacademic factors that participants perceived as obstacles in their academic journey included: (a) finances, (b) family/children, (c) work/job, and (d) life.

**Academic**

The academic factors or obstacles that contributed to the lack of success in an ABSN nursing course varied among participants. Participant P-1 shared concerns about communication:

Maybe, the introduction to nursing class that I had needed a little more background information or maybe a little less background and a little more, like, hey…this is what you’re going to be learning. That’s the class I failed at the beginning. It’s a lot of information shoved into a short amount of time.

Participant P-2 agreed stating:

It was mainly academic…they didn’t really tell us as much as maybe they should have. Like I didn’t know tutoring was available. All that an accelerated program is, a lot of online learning. More face-to-face time. I feel that there is a lot out there that just need to have that, like, hey, I’m willing to meet with you for an hour, you know, once a week to discuss what’s going to be on the test.

Participant P-5 shared experiences relating to face-to-face interaction stating, “Yep, so we were in the classroom on campus a lot…generally speaking we were in the classroom for everything and then plus simulation we did in sim lab.” Participants P-7 and P-11 shared similar concerns about lack of face-to-face interaction or a minimal amount.

All participants agreed that they were given a wide variety of learning materials to include, including textbooks, instructor voice-over PowerPoints, online learning activities, case
studies, and supplemental videos that seemed to accommodate multiple learning styles.

However, participant P-4 shared this experience related to adaptive learning, communication, and curriculum:

You had to keep changing in the way you did things…Some of them were [instructors], like they were more focused on the lectures for the class. Others, it would help you more if you read the book. And then some others, it was just a mix of anything. I remember in one of the classes I took, which I passed, I changed the way that I studied for each exam. I mean, everyone has a way of studying, but I had to do it differently every semester. And I’m like, how on earth are we supposed to like read the whole book and almost regurgitate it in our minds during an exam?

Stress and anxiety also contributed to the obstacles students encountered. Participant P-10 shared, “So the experience for me…well…I had like anxiety.” In addition, participant P-10 also contributed:

I’m older than I look so…when I came into the program I…and I’m you know, trying to study the same way I was studying in my early twenties, and I’m just like…this is not working for nursing…but then I also have anxiety…and then finding out that, you know I have this severe social anxiety performance-based, which ultimately is like like this learning disability.

Although participant P-12 felt that the program met some of the expectations, it was stated that “I just didn’t expect this kind of intensity.” Participant P-4 remembered, “I spent most of my time stressing about the Intro class that I failed, and then because I was behind the eight-ball, it makes it worse.” Also adding, “So if you don’t do good on one of the tests, you’re kind of stressing because you are going uphill.”
Ten participants mentioned studying or some form of studying as an academic obstacle. For some participants, it was admittedly an unexpected challenge. Participant P-1 stated, “I actually had to study. I had to sit down and really read the PowerPoints and go through the textbook multiple times.” Participant P-5 shared, “We all kind of, you know, we had little study groups.” Participant P-7 shared, “Like your physiology and your pharmacology, stuff like that took a lot longer to study...every night for 3 or 4 hours.”

Nonacademic

Along with the academic rigor of ABSN courses and impactful academic factors, nonacademic factors significantly contributed to the obstacles encountered during the program. These students were adult learners whose average age was 35 and had already achieved a bachelor’s degree from another program. The participants faced different responsibilities as adult learners than the average college student in a traditional program. Nonacademic factors that participants perceived as obstacles in their academic journey included: (a) finances, (b) family/children, (c) work/job, and (d) life. Seven participants (P-1, P-2, P-5, P-6, P-9, P-10, and P-11) mentioned finances. Seven participants (P-4, P-5, P-6, P-7, P-8, P-9, and P-11) noted family and children. All participants except P-2, P-7, and P-12 cited work/job as an obstacle. Six participants (P-2, P-5, P-7, P-8, P-9, and P-11) encountered a “life” incident that impacted their success.

Participant P-5 shared another view, “I’ve moved away from campus…financial reasons. So someone I know, after he failed a class, he realized...figured it out financially, whatever he had to do and stop working.” Although many mentioned financial challenges, participant P-6 shared an emotional experience stating:
So, per se, the 26-year-old cute blonde with no kids and mommy and daddy are supporting them, they had more of a success factor than I did. But you have to go home and feed your kids. You have to pick them up from school. You have to pay bills. You have to, you know…I had to quit my job for this. We finished our first semester…I was like, I can’t afford it., there became a time where he [husband] wasn’t making as much, and it was just putting stress on the finances of the house.

P-6 continued, “I have to do what’s best for the children. I’ve got four kids, so I have to do what’s best for them.”

In addition to finances, family and children also weighed into the nonacademic obstacle equation. One single parent shared a similar experience:

Having to juggle clinical days and my parenting schedule as well and studying time. It’s like a lot of manipulation I had to do in my home life in order to maintain a level of time to study for all these classes I was in…and the assignments as well.

Another single parent also contributed, “I’m feeling alone with my daughter, on my own and everything.”

Participant P-8 emotionally shared, “I’m also married, and I have 2 children, so…and I also still work. So, I’m doing that all during the program.” Participant P-9 expressed a similar experience:

And I think…like I have coworkers who have no kids, they’re not married, and they are able to do that but I still had to work, and I still had my kids, and on top of the endless hours of studying.

Work and job concerns weighed heavily on the minds of these participants. Many students had to limit the time they spent at work, as evidenced by the following statements. “That
kind of makes it hard to have a job if you had to” (P-1). “But I only work during my breaks from school.” “Right now I’m only working one day a week” (P-2). P-4 stated, “I mean, they told me not to work during the program. Honestly, I just worked less days. I have to tell work. They’re gonna be a little upset that I’m jumping all over the place.” P-5 contributed, “I know a few others that failed, and two failed out of the program. They were the only ones who continued to work.” “Having to be on campus four days a week for clinical and sims, I could not hold a job (P-7).”

Some participants experienced life events that contributed to their lack of success in a required nursing course. Participant P-2 shared the following:

And then, you know, I had that same semester, that was the year that there was a couple wildfires…that burned very close to relatives and family friends’ houses. So, there were other things on your mind that might take away from your studies, you know. You gotta finish your clinicals. You wanna do well in those. You got exams coming up. And then, you have a couple family friends and family that might be losing their homes in a wildfire. With that being said, I think that nursing school is your life and that’s all that it is.

Participant P-7 recounted another life event, sharing, “Mine were nonacademic. My daughter was sick and then in the hospital, and my husband works… it’s hard when a life schedule needs to be accommodated.”

Participant P-11 painfully recalled:

But…so at this time, the exam period, I lost my mother. I could not take the time off to go and see her [mother died in another country] and still be in the program. I was trying to get over my mother dying and not being able to go there and say goodbye. Just life
problems that contributed. It was too much from right, left, backside front…all the way around…it was too much.

**Theme 3: Success Strategies**

Participants also shared their experiences by reflecting and identifying what they believed would have helped them succeed in the required courses. Both academic and nonacademic strategies were discussed with participants based on the perception of the obstacle encountered. Sub-themes recognized as success strategies included: (a) clinical experiences, (b) time management, (c) peer and faculty support, and (d) previous experiences.

**Clinical Experiences**

ABSN programs are predominantly fast-paced, and the majority of learning is done online with limited hands-on experience. Participants strongly suggested that part of their success was to relish the simulation and clinical time to apply what was taught in the didactic portion of the class. Participant P-4 shared, “…the clinical experience was something that was a lot better than some other programs.” Participant P-4 continued stating that although simulation time in the lab was helpful, however, “…that’s hard to learn, because it’s not like a real person response. When you are in a situation where someone could talk back, you have no idea what to do.” Participant P-5 shared that clinical experiences were limited due to time constraints and that having more time in a particular clinical setting would have been helpful.

**Time Management**

Organization and time management played vital roles for students repeating required nursing courses. Participant P-1 shared that blocking out specific scheduled times was a necessary component for success to accomplish and organize time. Participant P-5 shared, “I learned time management in that program. You know, finally, after 16 years of school, I finally
was like…I guess I can’t just procrastinate and still do well.” Some students found reorganization of their lives personally and professionally promoted success. Sharing family responsibility helped organize time. As participant P-5 shared, “Their spouses knew…the next 16 months you are like the main person. They all came into it with that setup so that they could be successful.” The family organization contributed to success as well as work schedule adjustments to accommodate nursing school demands. However, children and spouses did not always understand the demands of an accelerated nursing program. Participant 7 added, “My son was constantly trying to talk to people, even when I was with a tutor…so it’s like you can’t get nothing done…so I would have to put him to bed and then start doing stuff.” Laughing, P-7 added, “Yeah, it’s harder for me, and he doesn’t get it. [laughing] My husband…he just doesn’t get it sometimes.”

Participant P-8 shared the value of preparation and self-evaluation, stating:

I’ve always been a good test taker. They tried to scare the death out of me…that these were the scariest tests ever…and I was like, no, I know about that because I was already getting books and studying the formats of the questions and stuff like that. I’ve always been good at managing my time. I’m pretty much a Type A person, so I manage my time. So I’m doing all that during the program, so I had my time very well in order to fit everything. I also had a big whiteboard which I work the week out on…with the kids, and the sports and the school and the work. I budget a certain amount of time per day to make sure that I dedicate it to school work.

After failing a class and sitting out a semester, participant P-4 found a unique technique to prepare in advance and thoughtfully shared:
The way that I prepared for this program…people said that I was kind of different…but I would read four books at a time—different books. And people are like, why are you doing that? And I said, well, when you’re in school, you could be taking four classes at a time, and you’re reading four different books anyway. So I started preparing my mind…I was reading four books at a time. I would put one book down and then pick up the other one. I’m like, well, it’s just like anything else. If you … it’s any skill that you have any interest in, you know. It’s like if you were like, I don’t know, riding a bike and then you set that down and go play basketball, you still know how to do it. It made sense for me to prepare for that mentally.

Other participants felt that an ABSN program allowed for more flexibility in their schedule because they were not required to devote large blocks of time to be in person at school. P-6 shared, “…it was more flexible with my work life. I was able to keep a job…it was centered around working adults.”

**Peer and Faculty Support**

Many participants agreed the ABSN programs offered multiple academic resources and teaching platforms for support and success. Included were voice-over PowerPoints, virtual tutoring sessions, and additional study resources and exercises. Participant P-5 felt a sense of community with peers stating, “We definitely built a community within our cohort. Everyone tried to help everyone…we had little study groups.” Others shared, “We put our heads together and shared…I think it was because we were such a small group, and you know we depended on each other a lot.”

Even though these participants had to retake courses within their ABSN program, 7 out of 11 participants passionately felt that faculty/instructor support was valued and undoubtedly
contributed to their success. Participant P-2 passionately expressed, “The professors were all amazing…I cannot, you know, say anything bad about any of them. Whether it’s an instructor, tutor, another instructor…who is knowledgeable in that area, it’s going to help build that structure…” Participant P-2 also felt that the program director and multiple faculty members fought for, and encouraged success which created additional confidence in the student, who went on to share, “Yeah, you failed a class, ok, we’ll give you a chance to repeat that class…things happen in life. Instructors had faith in me and felt I would make a good nurse.”

Additionally, Participant P-5 shared, “We had absolutely incredible professors who genuinely cared about not only us passing but us learning and being successful and thriving.” Participant P-6 concurred, stating, “I had really good clinical instructors. Clinical instructors applied their real-life scenarios…they gave us tools for our tool bag…helped us critically think.” “…she always made sure we had what we needed.”

Previous Experiences

As ABSN students, participants entered the program with previous college experience and degrees. Some programs required previous bachelor’s degrees, while some accepted associate degrees with work experience. However, all participants entered the program with some past academic achievements and life experiences. Participants boasted a range of medical or science backgrounds, including certified nursing assistants, certified medical assistants, massage therapists, emergency medical technicians, and biology and health care management. Participants stated their opinions on the belief that ABSN students should have some medical education or background to be successful in the program.

Also, some participants shared advice on age and the importance of previous experiences. Participant P-2 stated, “You know, go become a CNA [certified nursing assistant] or a medical
assistant. I became a CMT [certified medical assistant]…that’s what lit the fire to be a nurse. They’ve had to look at other options because those options when they were younger had been exhausted for some reason.” Participant P-4 acknowledged, “I went through a CNA program, I was in a massage therapy program.” Participant P-6 stated, “I come from a medical assisting background. I got to work with doctors that were teachers.”

Age factored into strong opinions and personal reflections on success. Participant P-5 confirmed, “Being older, you realize what you want…it puts it a little bit more into perspective. There were definitely 5 or 6 who were…10 years into a career and then went back for nursing.” Participant P-8 felt that prior university classes were more difficult based on life position, “I guess just because I didn’t have as much going on, like then, like personally or like responsibility wise.”

**Theme 4: Participant Guidance**

The final theme was related to insights the participants would share with someone looking to enter an ABSN program. The sub-themes included: (a) guidance and (b) the nurse dream. Some participants offered academic advice, and some provided stories of a heartfelt passion for nursing. Ten out of 11 participants, even though they failed a course, showed no regret in persevering to achieve success.

**Guidance**

Multiple participants offered advice for those considering an ABSN program. Suggestions ranged from establishing a great family support system to modifying and applying strict scheduling and placing themselves in the right mindset to accomplish the task. First, the repeated suggestion was for individuals to do a self-evaluation. Self-evaluation meant looking at home situations and support, whether emotionally or financially, work schedules, stress factors,
and overall life adaptability around an accelerated nursing program. Participant P-7 realistically stated, “So I would just tell people to just look at their own circumstances, situation and then make their decision from there.” Participant P-4 confirmed, “I would say, become a nurse. It’s an amazing career.”

**The Nurse Dream**

Participants eagerly detailed their strategies for success in the ABSN program. However, of all the strategies and techniques used, the most intense passion radiated from the ultimate goal of the ABSN program, which was to become a nurse. Participant P-2 provided strong encouragement stating, “Use your resources and do whatever you have to…if your passion is to be a nurse, don’t give up. Fight…tell them why you deserve to be a nurse…what’s my passion to be a nurse?” Participant P-4 reflected on the failure of a class imparting, “Because that was the goal right? To get done as fast as possible and be out there and follow your dream that you had set…but I think just accepting that maybe it wasn’t your time yet.” Participant P-11 tearfully shared, “But when I have a goal I put the whole me into it. I wanted to show my teenage daughter that I could do it.” Participant P-6 movingly summed it up in just three words, “Blood, sweat, and tears.”

**Findings in Relation to the Research Question**

The focus of the research question was regarding strategies that repeat students describe they used to overcome obstacles and complete ABSN courses. Students shared their experiences and techniques they used to persevere through an ABSN program. The rich stories of persistence assisted in providing information to thoroughly address the research question. ABSN students provided insightful, practical, and sometimes emotional feedback relating to the obstacles that were encountered and overcome along their nursing academic journey. Theme 1 exhibited the
participant’s perceptions of the various ABSN program requirements. Some participants felt that their expectations of the program were met while others felt they were not. Theme 2 elicited the participant’s obstacles encountered in their academic journey. These obstacles were categorized as academic factors and nonacademic factors. Theme 3 highlighted multiple success strategies participants embraced to overcome perceived obstacles. These strategies ultimately led to success when repeating required nursing courses. Theme 4 evoked participants to share words of encouragement, and suggestions for academic success after failing a nursing course. The participants provided heartfelt compassion to share their stories to help others seeking to fulfill the goal of becoming a nurse.

**Summary**

The research question presented for this dissertation study was to determine what strategies repeat students described they used to overcome obstacles and complete ABSN courses. The 11 participants provided data that assisted in answering the research question by sharing their stories and experiences relating to the challenges encountered in the ABSN program and strategies used to achieve success. After analysis of the collected data, four themes emerged. The four themes were: (a) program expectations, (b) obstacles, (c) success strategies, and (d) participant guidance. Participants recognized academic and nonacademic factors as obstacles and provided segregated strategies for overcoming and achieving success. Chapter 5 will provide a detailed discussion and interpretation of the data results. Chapter 5 will include implications of the study, limitations, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 5 is the concluding chapter of this dissertation study. A summary and discussion of the results will be included to understand and answer what strategies repeat accelerated baccalaureate of science nursing (ABSN) students used to overcome obstacles and complete required nursing courses. Chapter 5 will provide a summary and discussion of the results compiled in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 compares previous and current literature and how the findings related to the theoretical framework of Weiner (1986). In addition, interpretations of the findings, limitations of the study, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research were discussed.

Summary of the Results

According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN, 2020), there will be a worldwide spread of nursing shortages between 2016 and 2030. Specifically contributing to this shortage are the retirement of Baby Boomer nurses, increasing health care needs due to the aging of the Baby Boomer population, and, more recently, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Williams et al. (2018) stated that graduates of ABSN programs that passed the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) on the first try are likely to pursue further nursing education. The struggle for retention is an even more significant concern in accelerated and long-distance education. Students’ stories sharing the perception of individual
experiences and descriptions of strategies, techniques, and resources used to accomplish success are frequently not captured.

When students experience failure in a required nursing course, a decision to persevere and find ways to overcome the barriers or to leave nursing school is a turning point in their academic journey. In recent studies, some modifications have been implemented when reaching additional students through distance education. However, retention and identifying ways to reduce attrition remain an unaddressed issue from the student's perspective (Barton et al., 2017; Smith-Wacholz et al., 2019). Course or program outcomes and examinations are somewhat standardized within nursing programs (Fraser et al., 2018). However, the student or instructor’s interventions should not be standardized but individualized for student success. Snow (2016) shared that academic programs and students could identify several variables, including students, events, and institutions, when these individuals decide to persist after course failure. Academic and nonacademic factors relating to student success and failure are often identified in studies related to academic progression (Berk, 2018; Chavan et al., 2019; Dube & Mlotshwa, 2018; Elmir et al., 2019; Iheduru-Anderson, 2021; Meyer et al., 2021). Few studies and limited research have been conducted focusing on the success rate related to students’ experiences (Fraser et al., 2018).

Additionally, previous research studies lack specific identification of ABSN students repeating required nursing courses. Barton et al. (2017) and Dube and Mlotshwa (2018) explored factors relating to efficacy levels as students adjust to the learning environment of nursing school and student characteristics of those unable to complete an ABSN program. This research study explored strategies used by repeat ABSN students to overcome obstacles and complete required nursing courses. However, if there was a failure in nursing courses during the ABSN program,
successful techniques utilized by the students were not identified. Berk (2018) suggested that exploration relating to persistence-related motivational factors is still needed to provide understanding in academia and future job performance.

**Discussion of the Results**

The completion of this qualitative research study contributed rich, resilient stories of persistence that addressed and provided insight and answers to the research question: What strategies do repeat students describe they used to overcome obstacles and complete ABSN courses? The guided interview process utilizing open-ended questions allowed the participants to share insight and experiences relating to their personal stories of persistence. The responses and discussions exposed rich opinions, experiences, and reflections on successes and failures in the ABSN academic journey, which addressed the literature gap related to this specific and unique student population.

The data analysis initially revealed over 30 repetitive codes or phrases that the 11 participants shared. These findings delineated four dominant themes: program expectations, obstacles, success strategies, and participant guidance. The obstacle theme was divided into subthemes that identified academic and nonacademic obstacles. Themes and subthemes are displayed in Figure 1.
Program Expectations

The participants in this research study all qualified for the accredited ABSN program of their choice. Qualifications included a previous bachelor’s degree or, in some cases, a designated number of academic credit hours previously earned with relevant work experience considered and applied. The topic of program expectations elicited mixed opinions. Of the 11 participants, only four felt that their understanding of program expectations was met and prepared them
adequately based on the information presented by the school. Although one participant was undecided, six participants felt that their expectations of the ABSN program were not met. All participants stated that information was provided by the chosen university representing the course plan and included an estimated program completion time frame. Although the schools provided program information, participants felt that marketing strategies presented by the schools prevented underlying factors from being disclosed before entry into the program. For instance, although the average time to complete an ABSN program is approximately 16 months, some participants felt it was too fast-paced to comprehend and absorb the required content thoroughly.

Even though students were aware of the program’s anticipated completion timeline, participants did not feel that their institution communicated sufficient information upon admission regarding the overall time commitment outside classes necessary to complete the ABSN program. This information would include clinical hours, simulation schedules, skills practice and demonstrations, and examination remediation. Some participants cited the lack of communication upon admittance into the ABSN program as their perception of expectations not being met. Several participants also shared that available resources were not offered to them as tools for success within the program. The participants felt they could have been more successful if additional academic resources had been provided and more open communication had been initiated before entering an ABSN program.

Academic and Nonacademic Obstacles

Academic and nonacademic factors can hinder success in an accelerated nursing program (Bakker et al., 2019; Naude, 2019; Snow, 2016). When participants willingly shared their stories of persistence in achieving success in an ABSN program, it became apparent that obstacles fell
into multiple categories. The categories were divided into academic obstacles and nonacademic obstacles. As participants shared their experiences, segregation of these topics often emerged unexpectedly.

Multiple academic factors revealed themselves throughout the interview process. Participants shared their unexpected need to adapt their learning styles due to the unique characteristics of an ABSN program. To adjust, the participants were required to implement new learning and study techniques to assimilate to the lack of face-to-face instruction and various learning materials. Participants found themselves ill prepared for the nursing curriculum’s content, comparing aspects of the program to their previous academic experience. Lavoie-Tremblay et al. (2021) reported additional academic obstacles, including increased stress and anxiety related to nursing examinations and high clinical performance expectations. Participants often felt that adjusting to nursing school would not be stressful because they had already achieved a degree. Participants shared that, in retrospect, a better studying plan, the creation of small study groups, and easily accessible tutoring options presented at the start of the ABSN program may have prevented a course failure.

Most participants emotionally shared their stories of the unexpected impact nonacademic factors had on their lack of success in the ABSN program. As the interviews continued, a cyclical pattern emerged when discussing nonacademic aspects. Due to the vast quantity of work, the compacted time frame, and the depth of nursing curriculum content, many participants needed to shorten their work hours or stop working altogether. This unexpected change impacted their job credibility as well as the financial status of their households. Additional responsibilities now fell on other family members so the participant could devote more time to the ABSN program. In addition, participants sacrificed valuable personal and family time as a trade-off for
success. Although many circumstances can influence reasons for success or failure and can be modified or controlled, the impact of severe and unforeseen life events sometimes became impossible to overcome. Often, school administrators did not grant individual consideration when extenuating circumstances presented themselves.

**Success Strategies**

After facing the challenge of repeating one or more courses in the ABSN program, participants willingly reflected and shared aspects that contributed to their success. As with academic and nonacademic obstacles, many success strategies, when discussed, appeared cyclical. As participants implemented corrective techniques, the results benefited in overcoming academic and nonacademic barriers. Participants agreed that organization and time management quickly produced successful results that contributed to their academic success and also addressed job concerns and time management with family.

Participants shared that utilizing academic support and resources and having additional peer interaction contributed to a better understanding of curriculum content. Interacting with peers provided a sense of emotional support and camaraderie. Clinical experiences and lab simulations also offered students a more thorough understanding of content through application. Participants working in some aspects of the medical field felt they had the upper hand when beginning the program. Sharing past experiences and reflecting on life lessons provided reference and perspective when evaluating paths to success for several participants. When participants failed a required course, family, peers, or faculty provided encouragement and a “don’t quit” perspective that produced additional motivation to persevere.

An unexpected finding presented itself as participants shared opinions and stories of faculty and instructor support. The expectation may have been for the students to blame the
faculty and instructors for various reasons. However, all but three participants praised their experience with faculty members. Students recounted memorable clinical experiences, educational interactions, and nursing expertise in the classroom and clinical settings. Participants felt that the faculty strongly encouraged the students in all aspects of the program. The instructors indisputably had a profound impact on these students.

**Participant Guidance**

As participants shared their stories of persistence and grit, they willingly offered suggestions to others as they reflected on the obstacles they encountered in their academic journey. Several participants emphasized the importance of each potential ABSN student to self-evaluate their goals, personal life situations, and variables that may impact success in the ABSN program. These variables included finances, children, spouse, and work. Preparation and planning were reflectively mentioned by the participants multiple times as suggestions for success. Although the participants realized that the ABSN program was their individual choice and journey, they quickly acknowledged the importance of family support. Many students committing themselves to an accelerated program also found it helpful to gain cooperation from family members. This combined effort often included the distribution of family responsibilities so that the student could commit more time to academic demands. Usually, this was needed for the duration of the program to achieve success and provide less stress for the student. However, it added stress to the other family members in different ways.

Often, the initial draw to these programs for second-degree adult students is the ability to complete the program in an accelerated time frame (Beogo et al., 2015). However, as experienced by some participants, this format of nursing education is not conducive to everyone’s learning style or life situation. Additionally, although the program is considered to be
accelerated, the time spent in school is extended if classes need to be repeated. Participants also shared the importance of potential students clearly understanding the ABSN program of choice and considering other options that may be more suitable for their situation.

Conclusions Based on the Results

The rich stories of persistence included the following themes: program expectations, academic and nonacademic obstacles, success strategies, and participant guidance. Although Tinto (1993) stated that educational, social factors, student history, and demographics all factored into the student’s success, stories of persistence have been minimally sought. Duckworth (2016) specified that further understanding how and why a student persists while facing struggles and obstacles may provide information to proactively address academic persistence.

The significance of the ABSN student success and retention topic is critical to the nursing education specialty. The reasons for attrition in the ABSN student population are complex and unique. Although studies have been conducted worldwide relating to nursing education and attrition, there is limited research exploring success and failure from the perspective of the student’s personal experiences. A qualitative methodology provided a collection of rich narratives of the participants’ experiences to provide insight into the research question. As participants shared stories and experiences, the human side of life was not lost in statistical equations but enriched as detailed stories of persistence emerged.

ABSN programs require significant and effective time management skills, higher order thinking, and cognitive load management (Coggins et al., 2016). All participants willingly enrolled in an ABSN program based on personal goals to become registered nurses. Although the criteria for each program were clearly stated, and they entered each program having previous
academic success, the ABSN program often was not what they expected it to be. Participants felt that a thorough explanation of the program should have also included information regarding their additional study resources and a realistic projection of time expectations. This knowledge would have allowed the students to be better prepared academically. In addition, work and family schedules could have been modified to make the best use of allotted time.

Data analysis showed that the academic and nonacademic obstacles created a cyclical encounter or domino effect. Aspects of academic and nonacademic factors impacted each other as students tried to navigate the nursing school curriculum and clinical expectations in conjunction with work, family, and unexpected life events. These experiences created a higher level of stress and anxiety and often caused the student to be unsuccessful in one or more required nursing courses. After having a failed experience, participants felt a higher level of determination to accomplish the goal of ABSN program completion. Many drew off past life experiences and reevaluated available resources that may have been overlooked. Although this created success, participants felt that if they had access to and were aware of these resources before classes began, they may have been better prepared and could have completed the program without failure.

**Comparison of Findings with Theoretical Framework**

The findings within this dissertation study aligned and agreed with Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory. Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory pertains to how individuals perceive the cause of the result with whether success is obtained. Applying this theory to individual students is explained by how the student determines the cause of their success or failures and how the individual is affected by those successes and failures. Weiner (1972) classified attributes into three tiers: locus of control, stability, and controllability. The theory reflects how thinking relates
to feeling and action (Weiner, 2008). The locus of causality is linked to internal and external factors. An internal element of success or failure may be the student’s ability or individual effort, whereas external factors relate to outlying circumstances. Internal factors may be overcome by self-evaluation of causes and events. The external elements place the responsibility on something other than themselves. When participants in this study failed a nursing course, it caused the student to evaluate what factors impacted that lack of success. Stability within Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory reflects whether an individual’s perception of a situation changes. Study participants viewed their situation as temporary until they completed the ABSN program. Participants could make internal and external modifications that contributed to their success. When participants sought additional academic resources and support, it fostered internal stability. For instance, when participants adjusted their work and family schedule, it created a sense of control over external factors. The choice of the individual may alter control of the situation. Controllability impacted the motivation and persistence of the participants to pursue their original academic goals.

Applying Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory to this research study created a lens of understanding. When the participants in this study determined a cause or explanation for their lack of success in a required nursing course, students were able to reevaluate and create a manageable plan to render a different result. Developing this specialized skill set can be advantageous in future professional and educational endeavors.

**Comparison of Findings and Previous Literature**

The findings within this study were comparable and supportive with previous scholarly literature that recognized the importance and impact that ABSN programs or graduate entry nursing (GEN) programs have in meeting the needs of the health care industry. The nursing
shortage and level of nursing student attrition can cause devastating results for the nursing profession worldwide (Kubec, 2017). However, this research study took previous literature findings and looked for a deeper understanding that would help future students and stakeholders understand success factors for ABSN students. Lewis et al. (2019) found that nursing students repeating required courses were evident in all prelicensure nursing programs, but more attention seemed focused on students who dropped out of nursing school. Students who are repeating courses appear to be a camouflaged subgroup. Read and Laschinger (2017) emphasized the importance of understanding the transitional experiences of ABSN students because these descriptive experiences were often not captured. Chavan et al. (2019) and Izadi et al. (2016) identified contributing factors to academic failure and the need to help students overcome obstacles. Yet, there was no reference to how students were to achieve this success. An additional study by Dube and Mlotshwa (2018) identified negative and positive influences that can impact individual academic performance; however, Dube and Mlotshwa (2018) acknowledged that the student’s role in educational improvement was not captured.

Nursing education is more than the acquisition of knowledge. Face-to-face experiences and skill application can assist in creating nurses that provide safe, quality care. Further literature alignment revealed itself in addressing the need for ABSN programs to initiate additional face-to-face opportunities, including more clinical hours and lab simulation experiences (DiMattio & Hudacek, 2020; Elmir et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2021). Although many ABSN programs are predominantly online, participants sought other opportunities for in-person options to apply knowledge and implement and experience critical thinking and clinical judgment practice.

The data compiled in this research study also aligned with literature regarding student well-being, mindset, and the impact of stress and anxiety in ABSN programs. The study
validated the concern that nursing students encountered higher levels of depression, anxiety, and fear. Previous authors agreed that grit and persistence are predictors of student retention, graduation rates, and overall well-being (Gurkova & Zelenikova, 2018; Huffman et al., 2021; Musso et al., 2019). Understanding the determining factors contributing to student stress will allow for developing coping methods for nursing students that can be integrated into a working environment (Kacan & Pallos, 2021). Williams (2020) challenged nursing faculty and stakeholders to understand and recognize different student mindsets to foster academic success.

**Interpretation of the Findings**

Academic and nonacademic factors were identified as impacting the success of ABSN students (Barton et al., 2017; Cadet, 2021; Green, 2020; Haddad et al., 2022; Jarosinski et al., 2022; Meyer et al., 2021; Schwartz & Gambescia, 2017; Spurlock, 2020). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore what strategies repeat students described they used to overcome obstacles and complete ABSN courses. Multiple barriers were recognized and categorized. Often the students perceived that they were being sold a product without personal details of how this experience may impact life priorities and the life adjustments that may need to occur before beginning the program. Participants felt that honest communication of the expectations of an accelerated program and the stress of the nursing curriculum may have prompted them to create an initial plan of action to address the factors that impacted their lack of success. Several participants felt they needed to adapt their learning to accommodate multiple teaching styles. Some students realized that additional academic resources were needed to promote their success but were unaware of their availability. Identifying the educational gap and desired resources may provide faculty opportunities to modify the curriculum to meet student needs (Wiersma et al., 2020).
Age and previous experience provided students with a better personal understanding of themselves as students and their ability to adapt to the rigor of an ABSN program. After the failure of a course, participants felt that they needed to alter their mindset to implement the steps required to ensure success. When these students experienced failure in a nursing course, the decision to persevere and find ways to overcome obstacles was a turning point in their academic journey. Webb-Williams (2018) concluded that students found it helpful to give themselves pep talks to continue promoting their success. Circumstantial self-evaluation, peer input, and faculty support allowed participants to reevaluate factors and modify behaviors to foster success.

An unexpected result that differed from the literature review was the overwhelming appreciation from the participants for the instructors within their ABSN program. Contrary to previous research studies, faculty could have fixed mindsets and lack empathy while trying to teach that trait to nursing students (Elmir et al., 2019; Thomas & Revell, 2016). Participants felt that the faculty continued to provide encouragement and support that helped them achieve their success. Often faculty encouraged students to learn from academic and personal negative experiences creating trustworthy relationships. Faculty also provided a “don’t quit” attitude, believing everyone deserves a second chance.

**Limitations**

As with most research studies, this qualitative study presented some limitations. Although data analysis revealed rich narratives addressing the research question, one of the limitations was the small sample size of participants. More data could have been gathered if the researcher had unlimited time and resources. Expanding the inclusion criteria to include ADN and traditional BSN nursing students could provide additional comparison information. One participant interview was excluded because no course had been repeated, but the participant
wanted to share success strategies. Diverse participants would only serve to enhance the results and experiences.

An additional limitation was the inconsistent academic implementation of ABSN programs. Although all were accredited programs, they differed in content delivery methods, entry requirements, and time frames to completion. Some programs were strictly online learning, while others were in person several times a week outside of assigned clinical time.

Although the researcher has experience interviewing patients in a healthcare setting, research interviewing presented other challenges. Another recognized limitation was the inexperience of the researcher when interviewing to collect data. Being a nursing educator could show bias. To prepare for this possibility, the researcher implemented additional steps to minimize bias, including expert reviews of the interview questions, journaling and note-taking during and after participant interviews, and mentor input.

**Implications for Practice**

The significance of successful methods used by ABSN students is critical to the nursing education specialty. The nursing shortage is a worldwide concern fostered by student attrition rates. School administrators can use the data compiled from student experiences of obstacles they encountered to establish better retention services, counseling, and programs to serve this population. Researching any discord from the variances between student expectations and experiences may help minimize future attrition in nursing students. This work may contribute to the knowledge of nursing education and provide a path to help nursing students complete the ABSN program successfully within the expected time frame. Students may also benefit when understanding what factors may hinder their success in an ABSN program so that future attributions management can be recognized and addressed. Understanding may inspire
perseverance that can strengthen a student’s ability to face similar obstacles in their future, personally, academically, and professionally, as a registered nurse and nurse leader.

Faculty and academic stakeholders are uniquely positioned to promote change within nursing programs. One suggested implication for practice by faculty and administration could be a detailed, on-campus orientation before admission into the ABSN program that clearly outlines the standards and goals of the program. This session could address the questions and concerns of the student. Enlisting a current ABSN student as a peer guest speaker to address questions from a student perspective may provide a less intimidating atmosphere. Because a primary concern was personal and academic time constraints, a workshop for organization and time management techniques may be beneficial.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This basic qualitative study was conducted with ABSN students who needed to repeat a required nursing course. A recommendation for further research would be to eliminate exclusion criteria to include ABSN students who successfully shared their stories of uninterrupted success within an ABSN program. Additionally, the study could consist of traditional BSN nursing students to compare the similarities and differences. The nursing community could benefit from an expanded mixed-methods research approach that gathered NCLEX statistics of students that repeated nursing courses.

Further research recommendations could be a qualitative study from the perspective of the faculty. A comparison could be made regarding differences in curriculum delivery methods between BSN and ABSN programs, and faculty experiences for promoting student success could be explored.
Conclusion

The most common measure of success in academia is to graduate. For nursing students, program success and graduation lead to the qualification to take the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX), which results in registered nurse licensure. ABSN programs have grown exponentially to meet the healthcare industry's needs and accommodate second-degree student needs. Often the road to graduation does not look the same for all ABSN students. This basic qualitative research study aimed to explore stories of persistence in ABSN students and how they overcame obstacles in their academic journey. This research study was developed in recognition of a literature gap regarding ABSN students repeating a required nursing course. A noted lack of student input and perception of individual experiences on strategies to overcome academic and nonacademic obstacles and achieve success in ABSN courses were identified. Rich stories of persistence were gathered from 11 participant interviews. Their stories recognized obstacles that impacted their success in an ABSN program. The key findings identified multiple barriers that were classified as academic and nonacademic. Participants further shared their experiences and strategies for overcoming these obstacles and achieving success.

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2020) predicted nursing shortages due to Baby Boomer nurses retiring and needing medical care as they age. However, those nursing shortages have been exacerbated worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nurses are built on a core foundation to help others. Nursing instructors follow that framework in a hospital environment with patients or a classroom with nursing students. Although nursing school is challenging no matter what type of program a student attends, the stories of perseverance gathered from participants provided additional understanding that will help administrators and
educators recognize at-risk students. Recognition of academic and nonacademic obstacles will allow the implementation of assistance to help these students persevere and succeed.

These participants shared their stories to help others succeed and serve their community through their dream of becoming a nurse. Further research should gather more detailed knowledge of success within multiple nursing education tracks and invoke faculty input and strategic engagement. It could invoke strategies for counseling, academic resources, and curriculum modification to allow future ABSN and all nursing students to accomplish their goal of becoming a nurse.
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APPENDIX A. Concept Map of Theme Development